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ABSTRACT

Four Maryland middle schools, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), and the Carnegie Corporation are collaborating to develop models of early adolescent education that: (1) improve overall student and school performance; (2) coordinate comprehensive service delivery to students requiring such care; (3) stimulate collaborative development of appropriate instructional programs; (4) actively promote educational success for special student populations; and (5) institute systematic professional development opportunities for adults. This paper describes the progress made by program participants during the 1991-92 school year. The three-stage research process involved: (1) interviews with 64 students and observations of 44 classrooms conducted in spring 1992; (2) informal followup interviews with 46 teachers, 7 administrators, 8 support staff, and 2 parents in fall 1992; and (3) document analysis. The data identified three indicators of a shared vision of student success: a shared vision that is locally determined and based on research and experience; students who view themselves as active learners; and intensive, open dialogue across all levels. In summary, systemic restructuring takes considerable time, energy, and courage on the part of everyone. It is also an inherently messy process. If substantial, systemic change is to occur, all key stakeholder groups must be engaged in a very time-consuming process. (LMI)

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PROGRESS REPORT ON RESTRUCTURING PROGRESS IN FOUR MARYLAND MIDDLE SCHOOLS

An RBS Report on Progress During 1991/92

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November 1992

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Four Maryland middle schools, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), and the Carnegie Corporation are collaborating to develop models of early adolescent education that (1) improve overall student and school performance, (2) coordinate comprehensive service delivery to students requiring such care, (3) stimulate collaborative development of appropriate instructional programs, (4) actively promote educational success for special student populations, and (5) institute systematic professional development opportunities for adults. In the process, there is also the intention that the schools will become school-based professional development centers. The initiative requires that local school improvement teams, community service agencies, school district central offices, and MSDE "do business with one another differently" to break the traditional educational mold that allows a substantial segment of students to fall by the wayside. To engender this new way of doing business, participants will have to do much more than implement a new activity here or train a few teachers there. Indeed, dramatically altering the outcomes of schooling for all students means revamping the structure of schooling so that it complements rather than contradicts the attainment of those outcomes. In short, this project seeks to "restructure" the educational system in Maryland as it pertains to middle schools, pursuing different results by establishing new patterns of rules, roles, and relationships.

This report describes the progress that project participants say has been made during the 1991-1992 school year. Three major sections form the body of the report. In the first two sections separate data are presented for each of the four schools. The first section focuses on school-level changes perceived by teachers as they relate to the five project goals and the difficulties the

schools faced in accomplishing those goals. The second offers students' perspectives on what it means to be a student at each school. The final section offers our observations on the progress the project as a whole is making toward systemic restructuring, with particular reference to how changes in rules, roles, and relationships are producing a more focused agenda on improved student results. Prior to addressing these issues, we briefly describe our data collection activities for 1991-1992 and how we went about assembling the report.

Data Collection and Analysis Activities

Data collection activities included interviews with teachers, administrators, and support staff (counselors, nurses, etc.) in the late fall. These interviews were follow-ups to similar interviews conducted with adults in the four schools the previous spring and they generally lasted from 20 to 40 minutes. Overall, we talked to 46 teachers, seven administrators, eight support staff, and two parents across the four schools. In the early spring we interviewed 64 students and conducted observations of 44 classrooms, focusing on student-student and student-teacher interactions and covering a variety of subject areas at all grade levels -- social studies, foreign language, math, language arts, science, special education, home economics, physical education, computers, art, music. Informal contacts, including meetings and telephone conversations, were maintained with various Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) staff. Finally, documents for analysis were collected, including minutes of school improvement team meetings prepared by the technical assistance team (TAT) members across the four schools, school progress reports, and summaries of the results of the schools' assessment

activities. A draft of the section of the report pertaining to each school was shared with the schools and comments from school staff were incorporated.

The first section on school results is drawn from our interviews with staff members conducted late in the fall, the second section on students represents our discussions with them in the early spring. Within each of the role groups we categorized responses first by the questions we asked, and then we further coded the responses within each question as the answers related to participants' perceptions of their efforts in each of the five project goal areas. We also created a category of "difficulties" which cut across the goal areas.

In the text, we provide a nearly exhaustive list of the responses within each of the categories for each school. Our intention was not to provide every answer but rather to represent the range of participant beliefs expressed within that area. Furthermore, the data are not intended to be a catalogue of all the events taking place in the schools, but rather reflect participants' views of what they perceived to be the more significant activities. We acknowledge that these views only represent a "snapshot" of what is happening (as reported by teachers) and that important changes will be best addressed by repeated observations and interviews over the life of the project (all of which are planned over the course of the next several years).

Results at Each School

There is a distinct bias in education to wanting to see changes in "objective" measures of student and school performance. Such data are most convincing to the public and policy makers. However, in the early years of a major change effort, such measures are insensitive to what participants in the settings may see as clear indications of progress. As one teacher said, "It's

settings may see as clear indications of progress. As one teacher said, "It's hard to judge this success - how do you judge that?" So it is important for tracking mid-course progress in projects such as these to determine whether people in the settings "believe" positive changes are occurring. "Success breeds success," as the saying goes. That is, the prospect of attainable improvement is often the stimulus for sustained effort. Indeed, the major story from the school level during this school year is that people believe progress is being made. Certainly they offer caveats and worry a lot about the demands on them. But, on the whole, they indicate that their glass is half full.

Formally the project is addressing five goals: (1) improve overall student and school performance, (2) coordinate comprehensive service delivery to students requiring such care, (3) stimulate collaborative development of appropriate instructional programs, (4) actively promote educational success for special student populations, and (5) institute systematic professional development opportunities for adults. The first five parts of this section address the progress that people in each of the schools felt was being made with respect to each of these goals. Of course, growth is not smooth; there are starts and stops and backtracking. Thus, the sixth part of this section discusses some of the difficulties participants said they have experienced.

Brunswick Middle School

Student and school performance. Staff members' comments about effects on student performance sorted into four categories of answers: (1) test scores and other objective measures had to show improvement, (2) it was too early to see results, (3) students would not notice changes that had been made, and (4) a lot was happening that went beyond "hard" data.

First, people talked about test scores and other objective measures of what was happening to students. Some talked about this area with concern that there was too much emphasis on these indicators, especially district-wide, but they all realistically recognized that the measures had to be addressed.

> If we do what we want to do, if we truly believe [what we are doing is] for the better for the child, then test scores should be raised for children. Our test scores are the highest in county. We are doing things right the first time. We're a data driven system.

> We're reaching our goals: functional tests are up, attendance is up, the honor roll is up, kids are meeting department skills more adequately.

> [We've] gone from bottom to top dog in the county. The first year we opened no one ever wanted to come to Brunswick. We were at the bottom score-wise.

> We're really being held accountable for results of students, but we'll be backed as well.

Second, participants acknowledged that even though the school had been involved in school improvement activities for a while, it was still a little early to see those activities result in changes for students.

> Scores will rise; it hasn't happened yet.

> Still a little early for that, [but] a lot is happening. I can see it will have an impact soon. My being on the committee has impacted students in my thinking more about types of questions.

> It seems like a lot of committees that are [supposed] to help teachers help the students are just getting under way.

> We are not too far from affecting kids. Kids feel more comfortable this year. Sixth graders feel more comfortable, more so than the previous year. Maybe the staff is more comfortable.

> With kids, it hasn't changed yet; we're just in the beginning stages.

Third, a subgroup of interviewees felt that students would not necessarily be conscious of changes in students' daily lives. Thus, they cautioned us not

to make too much of students' saying that they were unaware of specific changes or activities.

> Some are aware, some aren't. Students are more aware of the district's science assessment than general school improvement. But the mission statement is repeated on the loudspeaker each day.
>
> I don't know if they appreciate it, but [students] have a better possibility of passing the functional tests.
>
> The school has a long history of school improvement so they wouldn't see much change, particularly in the affective [area] -- caring, intervening.
>
> Kids take learning for granted, so you won't see any changes.
>
> Right now, they don't notice everything. But more is being asked of them [critical thinking and increased expectations].
>
> I don't know if kids would see it as such. It seems so many people are pulling for the kids, [but I] don't think they take advantage. Everybody here is just waiting to be tapped, wishing kids would realize [it]. [Students are] building a cocoon.

Fourth, people had started to notice more subtle changes in students that would not be picked up on by standard indicators but that, according to staff members, were integral to a complete education.

> More critical thinking, more student participation and involvement, more student empowerment, giving them more choices, more than one way to answer questions. Learning is important. [The] learning process is more important than facts; it's trying to get them to make right decisions. There's more than one way to answer questions. So we'll adjust teaching to help them do that.
>
> The general atmosphere of the building still looks new because kids, faculty, and staff care about it and each other. [There is] respect for people and property. It's okay for teachers to use the kids' bathroom; you won't see writing on the wall. The caring atmosphere trickles down. Kids are helping each other in the classroom.
>
> The students were well behaved. They know when the teacher says something, the teacher means business. You're not going to get away with a lot; yet kids have more of a say in what happens. I like that because I let them have a part in decisionmaking (e.g., with certain classes I let them plan the lessons). We brainstorm types of assignments.

> [We're] more of a family (the BMS family). Kids don't fight because you don't do it to [your] family. [We follow] the golden rule: Do unto others as you have them do unto you. [Students] enjoy coming; they relate well to teaches and vice-versa.
>
> The building is well kept, clean; there is good discipline.
>
> Kids take care of the environment; kids like being here.
>
> You can see the relationship of kids to the staff, for example, [even the way the] janitors relate to kids in a positive way.
>
> They are getting excited about the things we are excited about. I see it in kids, more enthusiasm.
>
> There is more recognition of kids. They enjoy hearing their name and that what they have done is worthwhile.
>
> They feel safe and positive. We care about them and they know it. Every classroom has a mission statement.
>
> [There is a] more creative environment. Students are happier being here.
>
> As a result of the process, I would say staff and students take pride in themselves. It's a good place to be. A lot of kids go home where it isn't a great place to be.

Comprehensive service delivery. The school, of course, is looking to make stronger connections with the other agencies in their community that provide services to their students. Generally, the school has taken several concrete steps that seem to be bringing people together in ways that facilitate this goal. Those steps include establishing a way to coordinate services, using the school as a center for special family counseling services and recreation, and getting the Homework Hotline up and running. Another part of creating effective connections with the community is the school's becoming better at identifying students that may need services and becoming more aware of students who are already receiving services, both from outside service providers and special teachers within the school. Increased communication among staff members in the school is furthering progress in this area. This section concludes with a few

staff members' comments on the stance that parents seem to adopt with respect to the school, because, as one staff member put it, "where it starts is at home, isn't it?"

There was an overall sense running through the interviews that the school had made two major steps in becoming a more integral part of the community's network of service providers. Partially the school was improving the coordination among providers:

> [With respect to interagency], it's off the ground. Whenever a service is needed (court, counseling, medical, etc.), there is one central place for someone to come. It decreases duplication. We are in the process of hiring a coordinator.
>
> The interagency committee is wonderful; the agencies are coming here for family counseling. We're hoping to have a family counselor here in February. When I work with students, I can care for them. We have to have caring before you can have self-esteem.
>
> We're doing our best to reach out. [Parents] may not know about [the] interagency [goal] but they feel the effects.

And partially the school was physically becoming a magnet for people.

> Family Rec Night is on Tuesday evening [in the school]. It's nice to see families communicating and having a good time together.

The attitude of parents about the school did not seem to be identified by staff members as a problem. In fact, parents were generally viewed as supportive, albeit somewhat passive.

> [We have] nice community parents. [They're] supportive when called, but [they] don't initiate. Parents trust us, leave us alone, and don't need to get involved. We don't have a PTA.
>
> I see parents that want to support the school. They may not be sure how to, but they are willing. I see a feeling of cooperation; they're willing to work with you. It makes it easier [for me] to come to work.

So, to the extent that the school is going to be able to solder the connections with parents more solidly, especially in improving the coordination

and provision of social services, school people clearly viewed themselves as the ones that will have to supply the impetus. And they appeared to be doing just that, through talking internally to figure out who needs help and through making it easy for all parents to learn about what their children should be doing with homework.

> [We have] 1 day [a week] for guidance and discussing problem kids. For example, a kid's performance may be conditioned by where her father spends the night. It's not a sink or swim thing as it would be in other schools, [but still the problems affect the students].
>
> We share a lot of information about students, so you don't feel like you're the only one who has to figure it out.
>
> We've had a Homework Hotline for almost a year to be used if parents want to check on kids and call for absences.

Collaborative development. At the heart of the middle school concept is the interdisciplinary team. The school, according to teachers, has made great strides towards making these teams viable and vibrant working groups.

> We find natural crossovers, quite a bit surprisingly, as we sit and talk. Someone will see how things line up, and [we'll] do a couple of new units.
>
> We all contributed lessons for [activities]. In our warmups for functional tests, we find language arts in math [activities]. We're very flexible with time here too. No bells. If I need 20 minutes, I can ask [a teacher].
>
> The teaming model here is good.
>
> I love [my] team. Our kids are especially happy. Lots of camaraderie, no one is burned out. [There is] a willingness to experiment, sometimes because they have to, and more trust, I think now, in terms of trust of ideas.

The sort of communication that seems to go on within the teams also was pointed to by several people as a characteristic of the school as a whole.

> You don't get any zingers. Updates are ongoing and people are invited to any of the meetings.
>
> We meet every Wednesday morning and are briefed by the SIT.

Throughout the school, people felt that their opinions were listened to and taken into account when decisions were made.

> The school has empowered the staff; more than the SIT is involved in change.
>
> The school improvement team, out of the blue, just doesn't say 'we'll go into this.' [There is] a lot of discussion.
>
> On the SIT, more teacher input for change is there. Decisions? Yes. It is a committee approach rather than an individual one.
>
> A positive is being given the responsibility to make changes.
>
> Personally, I feel like part of a team. I am part of the school. The working relationship is wonderful, cooperative, willing to try new things.
>
> Every person has involvement.

Indeed, people relished the idea that they had the freedom to act on matters in the way they thought best and that their actions would be supported by others.

> People trusted my directions. The things I did. I can do what I want to do, obviously within limits, yet people were there for you. If there was a problem, there was someone to back you up.
>
> We're given pretty much free reign with the family we have.
>
> I feel a lot of schools don't have what we have because people at the top aren't willing to let loose of the reins and say here you go - take it away. We have a lot of support from the top.

Of course, the school improvement team (SIT) was the most visible embodiment of shared decisionmaking, and the consensus was that the group had become comfortable with its responsibilities and was accepted as the hub of decisionmaking in the school.

> It seems people are more comfortable, people laugh more. The team is smaller than the regular faculty. There's more open participation and sometimes two people carry on conversations. The group makes the decision, [the principal] provides more insight and does a lot of initiating.

> Important SIT decisions are so pervasive it's difficult to pinpoint [one].
>
> Listening to reports, discussions, offering opinions -- I have a lot of respect for the SIT. It works out things before coming to the faculty, works out the kinks.
>
> When the SIT came in, people not on the SIT were cautious, uncertain -- an arm of the administration? What is it? Department heads? Here you don't see any animosity now. You see the time and work.

Work done during the summer was given credit for enabling the team to become as effective as people seemed to think it was.

> You know what we did? We had a team building session. I thought it was a waste of time (before I went) but I realized I needed it more than anyone because I wouldn't speak out. I realized [most] people have some fears.
>
> The most important activity for the SIT was that we spent a day in meetings on team building. Now there is less adjustment, better consensus about the process, a better feeling of input.
>
> The day of team building? It was great to get away and work together.
>
> It helped with friction from the SIT last year and helped [the group] to become more cohesive as a group.
>
> The retreat day was beneficial to orient new team members, it was a less stress work day, it provided an introduction to the team. Previously I always felt we would start the year one step behind. Now we know who works best where.

The overall sense of collaboration, with its attendant hard work and satisfaction, in the school was nicely summarized by one of the interviewees:

> As I talked to friends, nobody is hearing complaints coming out of Brunswick. Usually with a pilot program, there is usually griping. Not at Brunswick. We work hard but [there is] recognition -- like 'Less Stress Friday' when we wear jeans."

Special student populations. Perhaps it would be most fair to say that all of the changes the school is attempting are intended to benefit all students. Thus, special needs students become a part of the whole rather than singled out

for attention. But the greater the communication among staff members about students, the greater the chance that special needs will be discovered and addressed.

> Wednesday is my favorite day because we get to actually talk about kids and personal problems.
>
> What are Wednesdays called? It's the day all teams sit down to discuss students with needs. We have met so often to talk about them. I want people to know teachers have put in a lot of hard work; they've given up old methods. Wonderful things are happening here; we're all very proud.
>
> We're small, so you know everyone, especially the kids. I can recognize faces in the halls, attach interests - even if just to say, 'you have a new haircut or jacket'.

Providing students with increased opportunities to be recognized for a wide variety of actions was one way people felt the school was doing more to draw more students into the mainstream of school life.

> We have an Outstanding Individual Achievement Subcommittee and Student of the Week. Each team selects one student each week and tries to hit the merit and lower kids.
>
> We have tutors who work with them now, revamped their program, and asked them for their ideas. We have the Different Drummer program for students to determine what their needs are. We thought the number of [at risk] kids was 9 or 12 but maybe [it's] 15 or 20 now. That's a lot in a school of 500. If you can [help] one student that's great.
>
> The Different Drummer Program is for those with less than C average.
>
> It recognizes differences in students, with lower than a C. Different Drummer comes in and looks for individual motivation.
>
> The kids you wanted it to hit, it did. We're going to get some rewards for these kids if they bring their grades up one letter. Some people didn't feel incentives were a good thing, but if a kid gets excited about food coupons or jeans, [why not try it]? The kids whose parents are not behind them need it.

Generally people seemed pleased with the progress and are confident that the strategies they are using facilitate their effectiveness with special student populations.

> It's working, kids are benefiting from the ideas. We're targeting more kids, targeting the at-risk ones. Teachers are helping kids.
>
> Brunswick hasn't always had a good reputation with [difficult] social situations. We have lots of at-risk kids. Now we're better able to do what's best for kids.
>
> You can't tell by looking what group is merit. The low end is unhappy elsewhere.

Professional development. Ultimately the schools are to become professional development centers for other schools. At present, understandably, they continue to wrestle with the kinds of staff development they themselves need. Much of this appears to be an outgrowth of trying to handle the tasks they have set for themselves. For example, one of the subcommittees introduced teaching techniques associated with its topic at a faculty meeting. And, as one teacher noted, simply planning what to do with a specific topic is useful: "I'm questioning a little different as a result of reading and doing research for the committee. Accepting different types of answers is an art."

The teaming arrangement also facilitates "natural staff development" in that they provide a comfortable forum to raise and discuss instructional matters. And several teachers in the school themselves now teach summer courses. Gradually more and more teachers in the school have been availing themselves of this opportunity to learn from each other.

> In the teams, people naturally come to us.
>
> I learned from teaching this past year and taking a course this summer [taught by a Brunswick faculty member].

Overall, people seemed to have realized that they are learning quite a lot and are becoming confident in their abilities as experts, both as instructors and as decisionmakers.

> We're more global now. We don't have our heads in the sand. There is a bigger standard we're moving toward. We have access to how other schools are faring. [All this] helps us keep our sanity and perspective.
>
> We realize we all didn't have the same idea [about shared decisionmaking] and realize people who write about it didn't either.
>
> I saw my high school [principal] last week. I was very proud to be from Brunswick and how far ahead of his school we are. I'm now teaching him. I would be a strong candidate if I wanted to teach elsewhere.
>
> It's nice having opportunities that would not otherwise be afforded us: speakers, conferences/retreats to meet with the other three schools.

Difficulties. Change has been going on at Brunswick for a while, and for the most part people talked as if many of the difficulties they faced early on were no longer issues. Still, there were concerns, which seemed to fall into five categories: (1) the stress associated with so much going on, (2) difficulty in keeping up with what everyone was doing, (3) the need to spread good activities to everyone in the school, (4) issues related to trying to share decisionmaking, and (5) the imposition of constraints from different levels of the educational system.

There is no question that change is difficult. And with it comes a great deal of stress and anxiety that often blurs the focus on the fact that progress is being made. Several staff members commented on the stress associated with the projects.

> [The negative is the] lack of time; I don't have enough time during the day. I can't leave work at work.
>
> As I ask for cooperation (extras in the day), it's been at times painful -- more painful this year as the SIT is more empowered.

God it's a lot of work, a lot of time.

Still there is a lot of concern because we're so busy. There is always stress with a grant. People all of a sudden are asked to do a little more.

[There] has to be a time where we stop adding new programs. We're getting too overburdened, taking away from teaching time. Tapping other energy takes away from instruction.

I taught 90 percent [of my time] when I first started [here]. Now I teach 60 percent. The rest is administration -- e.g., I lost a tutorial today and there were people in 5 of my 6 classrooms yesterday. I'd like a week with no interruptions. Kids need repetition and consistency. It's difficult to get that now.

However, in this school, the talk mostly suggested that people felt a good number of issues had been resolved. Staff members had a realistic understanding of the complexities of what they were going through. They knew it would not be easy, but they saw that the school was going in a positive direction. That fact made the work worthwhile.

I think there are people that think [there is] a lot that's being demanded of them. I personally don't. I knew that would be a part of volunteering. I don't feel that way.

People were hesitant about the extra work. As we've gotten up to speed, it's hard not to get involved.

I figured there would be mounds and mounds of extra work. There is some extra but not a lot. It can be incorporated into what I'm doing already, and I'm seeing a payoff.

There is more stress on everybody. We have an image to fulfill now. We used to be the school at the bottom and people just hid.

You get to a point where enough is enough, but if you don't take that shot, then you miss that opportunity. Sure you read the articles on the change process, like Guskey. It's inevitable. If the bucks are dangling, go for it.

When you agree to something, you just expect it [extra work]. It is not as bad as I thought. Just go along. You always will have complaining.

Still, a lot was happening in the school. Sometimes this meant that people could not keep up with what everyone else was doing and that people occasionally lost sight of how the activities were expected to fit together.

> There is not a whole lot of information across subcommittees.
>
> The SIT needs to coordinate a bit. The subcommittees are overlapping, some need more organization. Maybe they need to be working with each other more closely to do some reporting back.
>
> I don't have an understanding of the overall picture from the beginning. It's too generalized, and it feels like we're asked to make decisions when we don't know everything [we need to know]. Half went over my head. I don't have the big picture.

People realistically recognized that not everyone in the school viewed the changes positively. Some good activities were going on in some places with some people. Ultimately, for every child to benefit, then the issue of how to achieve widespread implementation will have to be addressed. Importantly, interviewees acknowledged the role of students in how effective implementation would be.

> You have to put the kids in charge of learning instead of being receptacles, get them doing more of the pulling out. The teacher is there as a back-up. Part of our learning is how much can kids do. Kids on lower levels don't do as well with this because it's not the kind of curriculum they encounter. If you're only one of two teachers exposing them to this, then the result is poor. But I wouldn't give up.
>
> We have 95 percent active supporters (on the increase) and 5 percent fence/sitters/resisters.
>
> I think we have 80 percent active and positive for school improvement and 20 percent bench/sitters/negatives.
>
> I have found some students resisting it [critical thinking]. Research says they will; they want that right answer. Honors students resisted the most.

Sharing decisionmaking is "in" right now in the United States. Despite that, there is little guidance available from educational research as to how to

do it. Schools like Brunswick are actually in the forefront of wrestling with these issues. People talked about a couple of interesting topics related to shared decisionmaking: the need for strong leadership balanced by the need to enable people to feel like decisions had not been made ahead of their being opened up to staff members.

> There is a need for a strong visionary leader, and we have it. Some here don't like it because its tiring and stressful. Even so, they admire and accept it because results are there.

> You need one or two people to have this vision, even if it's not administration. It could work if it's backed by administration. I don't know if John Doe teacher would have the vision to lead the school like [the principal] does and I don't know what we would do if he left. I think we would continue. Without a strong leader, I think the SIT would start from scratch. Sometimes people may want to go another way and wouldn't because [the principal] is so strong.

> Most of the time teachers share and are always open to discussion. There have been times when I think that somebody has their minds made up, but the choice [made] is probably the right decision [anyway]. So I don't discuss it [as a problem].

> The way decisions get made? Oh yes, basically it came from above. Getting into Carnegie was brought to us, but we've always gone along with everything and haven't said no yet [so do not know what would happen if did say no].

> I may be in disagreement [with a decision], but I'm not able to voice it.

Finally, staff members indicated that the school did not stand alone. Other levels of the system occasionally affected what went on in the building in terms of the school improvement process.

> Standardized tests...I think there's too much [emphasis], but the Central Office feels it's really important. Everything is test scores. Everyone knows that. It's how we turn out in test scores. But kids are important, sometimes the higher ups forget that. Parents put a lot of pressure on teachers. It's more a business. [There is] so much competition between schools. That's not good. All tests are not true; kids tense up.

> With the budget crunch, I don't think [there will be an] inservice day.
>
> The County has cut us off at the knees by cutting the summer workshop from 4 to 3 days and the compensated days from 5 to 3, with no rationale. It's disillusioning, disheartening. It's ludicrous to do it in 5, an insult to do it in 3. The decision shows a lack of commitment. The board has no idea as to the time and work involved. It clouded my view of improvement. They've lost me as far as a cheerleader for district school improvement, but I'm still a cheerleader for Brunswick.
>
> We had problems spending the money, but the county and board shouldn't have control of it [e.g. funding of coordinator for interagency].

Of course, the above discussion should not hide the fact that the majority of staff members felt that they wouldn't want to be anywhere else:

> Now I don't resent [the work]; the school is moving in a direction. I know the overall purpose is good.
>
> I was really enthusiastic about being here and wanted to become a part. I thought I'd died and gone to heaven.
>
> We still have more potential than other places and I wouldn't want to be a teacher anywhere else.

Canton Middle School

Student and school performance. When talking about student performance, teachers at Canton did not talk in terms of test scores or other quantitative indicators of student behavior (although the school did provide evidence this summer that attendance increased by five percentage points this past school year). Instead, they responded in terms of the general climate of the school. As one teacher commented: "There is a positive improved general atmosphere for students and staff. It's less stressful." Another confirmed that view by noting, "The relationships in the school speak for themselves. Everyone gets along really well." This atmosphere has set a new tone where students are taking school more seriously:

> The first thing I think of [with respect to school changes] is better student attitudes towards the teachers; we're

> seeing a change in kids and their behavior. There is still a lot of work to be done. There is also a change in philosophy, too. For example, an eighth grader at the beginning of year didn't want to work, just a bump on a log. [He/she] sincerely didn't want to work. I took it as a challenge. I started to get [him/her] involved. By the spring [he/she] had 70s, now 80s.
>
> There is a change of atmosphere in the school. We're trying to get kids interested not just for the sake of grades but for learning. Some students are excited. We are trying to have innovative ideas; we are trying to be exciting. We are trying to be a little more informal and not emphasize just grades, but rather things like community service. But it is hard [because people are used to the traditional approach]. Another thing we are doing is trying to get parents involved with things like homework volunteering. We are encouraging parents to get involved, more active, not just sitting at home. We have a homework hotline. Each teacher puts own his/her own messages on the hotline and makes suggestions for parents [about how they can get more involved].

Teachers were also quick to point out the ways in which the school had provided new opportunities for students to experience learning. An important component of that has been the introduction of community service activities with all the students in the school participating. The students can select from a wide range of options including volunteering in nursing homes, neighborhood clean-up, school beautification, community mural painting, and a children's clothing drive. Through a series of mini-courses students are able to be more active in the community. As two teachers commented:

> Every child is in mini-courses. They can do any number of them. But every child goes through, all mixed. I believe you have to expose kids to service. I have found they learn skills that open up their minds. We want to instill that they can make a difference in the community.
>
> Kids have a chance to grow and experience. If kids have artistic talent, we let them go with that - the kids might not be able to tell, but we let them build one (area of expertise). The past two years have flown by. I think the kids see a difference. There is still an adjustment from what the school used to be. But it is not such a big change that they should be traumatized -- there are still books, grades, etc.

There was also an acknowledgment on the part of the staff that the school as a whole was working together and becoming more actively involved: "There is more involvement with the entire staff." Part of that is a function of the fact that staff are meeting in groups on a more regular basis to plan future activities for the school: "The group of people who meets as the SIT [school improvement team] have gotten to know each other better." But that involvement spread beyond just the teachers. There was an indication that parents also are taking a more active role: "We are beginning to see more parents, more parent involvement. For example Tuesdays, there is a craft and bake sale. We didn't send invitations but parents came anyway." The principal was credited with being a catalyst in getting teachers to re-evaluate their own efforts: "Certainly staff are more aware of different things. The principal works with lots of over-age students [trying to get them] into the high school. Teachers now see this school as a place they can do different things."

This involvement has led to an increased sensitivity to the needs of students and a more positive approach to their problems:

> There is more staff awareness of kids' needs. They ask questions and seek advice. For example, a team leader asked for help on how to rechannel negative attention to positive. The result was only one discipline removal this year [in my classroom] because students like the positive attention.

The bottom line from several teachers' responses was that students seem to enjoy coming to school more. One teacher even remarked that students are starting to transfer into the school as a result of some of the positive things happening at Canton: "If the school wasn't a good environment, we wouldn't have so many students transferring into the school. One of my out-of-zoned students doesn't want to leave because [he/she] knows it's a good school."

Comprehensive service delivery. The purpose of this goal at Canton is to improve the connections with other agencies that provide services to students and their families. This involves not only identifying students who might need additional services but also linking the people who are providing those services with teachers at the school. The staff was quick to point out that this will be a difficult job since this is a community with lots of problems and few resources, as this one assessment illustrates:

> Unfortunately there is such a large population of dysfunctional families here. The community surrounding the area includes a high rise project. There is lower income here. We have sexual and physical abuse cases on file. So many parents are ready to give up, throw up their arms, just have their children put away. Most of the time they have no parenting skills. There is paint huffing, substance abuse, and the Patterson Park ring of people who get kids (mainly boys) into prostitution. In four years [in my other position], I saw less of this sort of thing than I have seen here in four months. It is also reflected in the attitude of kids and parents, staying with same thing, and not expanding horizons. That just recycles itself.

Canton has worked on building the link between the school and other service agencies by establishing full-time positions in the school for a program coordinator, a nurse, a mental health therapist, and a part-time social worker from an outside agency. These people bridge the outside agencies and the school. As one of them noted:

> I work for [medical center]. We are part of the interagency system. They placed me in the school and at the health center. The idea is to have a person here and a familiar face at the health center. Kids can't learn unless they are healthy. We're taking care of the whole child.

The school vehicle for building those links is the Primary Assessment Committee (PAC), consisting of the mental health therapist, the school social worker, the outside social worker, the Special Education department head, two counselors, two house principals, a local pediatrician, a representative from the city's Department of Social Services and Department of Juvenile Services,

and the coordinator who ties it all together. They meet weekly to work with students/families who have been identified as in need of special services, review progress from their own individual caseloads, and plan new strategies/activities. They make use of teacher referrals and are committed to a "holistic" approach to students. An important benefit for students is that once students have been identified by the PAC:

> Students now have between 10 and 14 people who are able to interact and relate to them. The students no longer need to rely on only one counselor or one teacher as their adult advocate in the building, but rather they know that they have many adults in the building who are 'there for them.'

But the PAC does more than work with students; it also actively reaches out to parents in several ways: the school was recently awarded a grant for adult literacy; the PAC has instituted a series of seminars designed to address topics of interest to parents of Canton students; the PAC publishes a newsletter directed at parents using articles written by the nurse and reprinted articles from other parents' and health publications; and, finally, there is also an effort to increase parental involvement within the school. Parents are now serving as cafeteria aides, paid substitute teachers, classroom helpers, and volunteers who accompany classes on trips. As one PAC member noted:

> The faculty was hesitant to embrace the involvement of parents [earlier in the project], but have seemed to be enthusiastic and have begun asking for volunteers to help in many new ways.

While the primary targets of the PAC's efforts are students and their families, it is also trying to educate the teaching staff:

> We put things in the staff bulletin like little tips on how to help teachers. We also share lists of commonly seen conditions on mental health issues.

The key to success of this ambitious initiative, from the views of the staff, is the continued support of the school. Will this just be one more

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program that withers after initial enthusiasm dies, or will it continue to be an important part of the daily life of the school? Initial reactions from staff have been favorable as this testimony from a teacher regarding administrative encouragement acknowledges: "The principal has given us an opportunity to branch out on this." But it is essential that the encouragement be continued, as another teacher pleaded:Support! Give us support. Keep supporting us and

> our programs. Without it we don't have anything. That's why the school must allow for mistakes and give us room to try [new things].

Collaborative development. At the heart of the whole project is the SIT. This is a group of teachers, administrators, parents, and other support staff. This team, with input from the entire staff, assesses student needs, develops schoolwide priorities to address these needs, and initiates an action plan to implement the priorities.

As with any new idea, the team started out very tentatively at Canton but quickly added momentum:

> At first it was rather rocky. We didn't have any understanding about what a SIT team was. There was a lot of mistrust. We'd never been on one. Here at Canton, we're never prepared for it whenever something comes up. You're just thrown into it. It's now working a lot smoother. People are coming up with ideas and actually doing things. At first we were just grappling over definitions -- quibble, quibble, quibble -- especially when we had to do things with kids [like plan classes]. It's a tough way to do things. Now it's better because everyone understands what everyone will say and why.

For the adults in the school the obvious payoff from this team initiative is the increased interaction about instructional matters.

> We have realized the programs needed to do something with kids that were not taking place anywhere else. We are talking more about what has to be done; we never did that before. A few of us are trying to do different things.

> People are willing to try new instructional techniques. Even some older staff are willing to give it a shot!

The benefits from increased collaboration also went beyond just teachers talking with one another more frequently and trying new ideas in their classrooms. There was also some evidence that students benefitted:

> The best thing was formation of a discipline committee. Changing some of the rules and putting them into black and white helps somewhat with disruptive children. They said, "let's get suggestions on how to deal with it." There was a lot of consternation among parents/teachers, kids disciplined in one way and some in others.

Special student populations. An important feature at Canton is the Canton Project, an attendance enhancement project designed for at-risk eighth grade students. This project was designed to identify and provide treatment for potential dropouts at the middle school. The project uses school-business partnerships as vehicles to motivate at-risk students to stay in school and to help them make the transition to high school [there is a high school counterpart - the FUTURES program.] Only 12 students were involved during 1991-92, but more than 60 students are scheduled for this school year, through the support of a special grant from the state of Maryland's Tomorrow Program. An academic component of the program is designed to improve students employability and life management skills, which are encouraged by weekly classes as well as an individualized teacher/advocate for each student who assists students in meeting their goals. A business component affords students a one-day-a-week paid work experience in a local business. A testament to the success of this program was offered by one teacher who reported that one student was turned around because "this is the only school that ever cared".

The interagency collaborative is another vehicle for providing extra assistance to high-risk students with extra needs. As one adult who works with specially identified students said:

> I'm comforting, reassuring, I care about them. I'm their number one advocate. I'm a new support system. Kids are coming to school on days that I'm here. My two most at-risk

> kids I see three days a week. Most of the kids have permanent passes, five have crisis passes to see me at any time. Teachers are not upset about having kids out. Their behavior is better in classroom as a result of my efforts.

However, the real potential of meeting this goal does not necessarily derive from the successes of individual programs targeted at special populations but rather from the philosophy underlying the improvements in the school that the changes are intended to benefit all students. Thus, special-needs students become a part of the whole rather than singled out for attention. The greater the communication among staff members about students, the greater the chance that special needs will be discovered and addressed.

Professional development. As the principal noted in a memo to the staff early in the Carnegie Project initiative, "An essential ingredient in the conversion of Canton to a middle school is staff development." The staff of the school also recognize the importance of this component as they are quick to point out that most of their peers have been working in the school trenches for many years and have not had an abundance of opportunities to be exposed to new ideas. The opportunity to learn and try out new techniques has been a breath of fresh air with a change in how teachers approach their work:

> I was struck when I came here of the old school mentality; we have changed the paradigm. Some teachers weren't happy with change, but now they are more open since staff development was introduced. Teachers are starting to look at kids differently.
> Teachers are more accepting of change and the new administration; the staff development initiatives helped. Those of us from the "old Canton" have dwindled down our complaints. [Complaining] is a little more frowned upon. There are certainly still resistant teachers, but it [resistance] is not as popular or as overt as it was.
>
> I like to see teachers willing to take a chance. A lot of kids don't have role models, so many of our teachers try to be that. Kids have a lot of goodness in them but some teachers see it as a job; we need to motivate them.

> Staff development has made us more rejuvenated. It is so thrilling to hear top notch people who we wouldn't normally have access to [without extra project funds]. Staff development has made you feel special and excited. I also see a little more follow through.

While the ultimate goal of the project is to have the schools become professional development centers for other schools, the staff at Canton continue to focus on the kinds of staff development they themselves need.

Difficulties. There is no question that change is difficult. While there is ample testimony to many positive things happening at Canton, there is also the clear acknowledgement that the stress and anxiety induced by these changes may also be taking their toll and blurring the focus the school has set for itself. As one teacher commented, "There is lots of upheaval, consternation, and unhappy people."

When the concerns are reviewed, no one single pattern emerges. Rather, there is a whole constellation of factors which sometimes get in the way of progress. For one teacher, the main concern was that his/her peers' commitment was not what it should be:

> I'm hoping for a commitment from teachers to put kids first. Teachers aren't willing to listen to kids. They need to treat them the way they want to be treated themselves. They need to respond more to developmental needs of kids, try to really understand kids. Some teachers don't seem to like kids. Some teachers think they're dealing with older students. If the school was more child oriented it would be a positive place for kids. We're moving in that direction but we have a long way to go.

For several others the district's programs and policies were the major culprit:

> The curriculum doesn't suit the majority of the kids.

> It's the curriculum in [district]. There were changes in elementary math that were not in a spiral concept even though the district said it was. So when we have two textbooks that didn't follow concepts through the same way, teachers have to know how to make the connection between the two series. Also, children who come here operate at the 3rd and 4th grade

> level at the highest. They aren't ready for 5, 6, or 7th grade texts.
>
> People are in a tired slump at the end of the day. I imagine businesses don't have major conferences at end of the day. Planning at the end of the day after you've taught all day doesn't work -- you are drained. We have responded to needs of others all day; it makes you exhausted. We also need smaller classes. We need to be able to have a relationship with these kids, not 37 in a mass. We need to be able to relate to them so they know we care. I believe some of them know that but they all need to. Smaller classes will allow us to have more time with them.

Time was another major theme in critiques by teachers. The time concerns ranged from not having been with the project long enough to see tangible benefits for students to teachers not having enough time to fit all the demands into their already overcommitted work schedules:

> This is a long process and we may may never see the fruits of our labor. For example, with eighth graders this year, the only fruits we will see is if they get into high school and stay.
>
> We need processing time. We need a year-round school with emphasis on the teacher fully processing what they teach. We need to have a class size of 20 students so you could give full time to that class, so we can get hands-on with kids and more flexible scheduling.
>
> Time is the other factor, there's not enough time to get kids to learn. The staff must cooperate.

Another important element in the difficulties teachers encountered was the widely varied staff views about new initiatives in the building. On the one side is the enthusiastic teacher willing to try just about anything:

> If we just simply do what we did in the first semester, then we would become a stagnant school. Ideas we didn't come up with in the first semester need to be tried in the second. We should see what makes a difference. Does it have an effect on the kids? Do I see kids who come back and say, "Why did we stop that? that was fun!"

While on the other side there is the teacher who is much more comfortable with a regular, patterned routine:

> Knowing when I came to school on Monday, I will have this schedule. I have periods 55, 60, and 70 minutes long. I hate working with a combined class of special education and advanced kids for 70 minutes. I cannot explain what I do. I just get through the period. All for the sake of change. They're just putting a child right back with the frustration of sitting next to gifted students instead of being seated where they can succeed best.

Another teacher eloquently pointed out a problem that is common in schools actively seeking to improve themselves; they initiate so many new things that people lose sight of what is really important.

> There are so many things thrown out at this school, the scheduling, etc. You never know if something works or not. It just pops up. There are never any preparations for it. I would be reluctant to say if something is working or not. So many things are going on. I feel my students are not getting information because of so many programs, so many schedules. The child that cannot deal with abrupt changes, they're frustrated, especially at this age. They need a little niche where they do the same thing all the time. It's better to keep some kind of an anchor. I know in midst of change there has to be a lot of movement, but students can't handle it.

Finally, there were also questions raised about the decisionmaking process.

> The school improvement team is not a decisionmaking group. The principal makes the decisions. Then it is presented to us in a way and you join in; you think you're doing it. That's the management style.

> You can see if a plan is presented, you can say I see some flaws but they say we're going to do it anyway [e.g. trimesters]. They said we're going to try it and we haven't given grades for the first group and now we have the next group already.

Despite the concerns and unresolved issues that are typical of the early stages of any major reform effort, there is still an upbeat tone among the participants at Canton. Their comments reflect an optimism that the effort is worth the investment:

> We want to intervene when kids are in trouble. We [teachers] are taking a more active role.

> I'm a strong supporter of what [the project] is doing. It has given us the opportunity to branch out.

> I see Canton doing a lot of things. I don't know if they are right or wrong, but I'll give the school the benefit of the doubt.

Middle River Middle School

Student and school performance. With respect to students, faculty members note that several behavioral areas seem to be changing: school-related work habits, discipline, participation in activities, and the overall "tone" of social interactions. Illustrative quotes that fit into each of these four categories follow.

The quotes portray a positive picture of changes in student performance. This is not to say that staff believe that they have achieved what they want to, but rather that staff believe marked progress is being made with respect to overall student demeanor. [No claims were made that students are doing better on standardized tests, which would be inappropriate to attribute to the projects at this point anyway.] To be sure, students are still failing to do their work, still acting out, and still ignoring offered opportunities. However, when compared to the situation just a couple of years before, staff can see some differences, for the better.

Work habit-related comments include the following:

> Attendance is better, absenteeism has been halved.

> [Students] have materials, are listening during class, act as if they're interested, and have homework.

> Kids get better grades; kids are turning in more work willingly.

> [They] finish the day's work; [and] that's different from what I'd heard was happening.

Discipline was a student behavior category that almost everyone touched on during the interviews. Always a preoccupation in middle schools, people seem to speak about it this year with a sense of relief:

I see fewer kids for discipline.

Definitely. My perspective is limited, [it] mainly comes from conversations with others. But I know referrals are different. They receive more immediate attention.

[There are] lower discipline problems. This school has 1,080 people. If we could take out one of eight, we'd have no office referrals. People having trouble in the hallways has dropped. Suspensions are down, but I'm not sure whether they're kept down or they're really down.

The flow of instruction is better because there is less disruption from behavior problems. [We are] further along in curriculum this year than last year.

Smiling, people talk about an increased student willingness to take part in extracurricular activities. There is a feeling that participants believe that students are beginning to enjoy some aspects of school life rather than being completely alienated from it. Sample comments include:

[At Halloween] 90 percent of faculty and 50 percent of the kids had Halloween costumes.

More kids are staying after school, maybe 250-300. [They're staying for] sports, clubs (like crafts, art), homework. My biggest problem is finding enough buses to get them home.

From the students eyes, things I've overheard, [they're] really enthusiastic. As soon as they hear something is going on, they look forward to it rather than say, "I don't know, I won't do it."

Perhaps most importantly, if the number of people who mentioned this area is an indication of significance, interview participants suggest that there is a different tone in the interactions among students and between students and staff members:

[My] objective impression? It seems as though they have a feeling of a more caring atmosphere. At the student council 'lock-in,' they commented about safer hallways.

Morale is so great, more like a family. I feel comfortable. People appear eager to do the job well, because others are doing their jobs well.

I've been involved in the whole thing sense the beginning. [Now] in the hall way, how we handle infractions is

different. The kids say they [are] being stopped and talked to rather than being written up.

[Positives are] the spirit among the students and the communication between the faculty.

[There is] better behavior in all hallways, less hostility, kids [are] more willing to talk one-on-one with teachers.

The tone is different in the hallway [between] students and staff, less confrontational [between] students and teachers.

Sixth graders seem more comfortable than in the past [less of a transition from elementary school]. The team is like a little elementary school.

Students seem happier, not snarling at one another or at teachers.

Kids are nicer to each other.

Running through the above quotes is the idea that the school has become clearer about what is expected, that increased "comfort" is partially related to increased predictability of actions and consequences. The result has been a more relaxed environment for students.

Kids know what the rules are and what to do. We are able to do fun things because kids know their boundaries.

I asked why? They said, 'having signs up let's us know what is expected.' So they were being held accountable for expectations that they know what they are.

The kids say, 'the signs are up'.

Comprehensive service delivery. The school, of course, is looking to make stronger connections with the other agencies in their communities that provide services to their students. Part of making these connections is the school's becoming more effective at identifying students that may need services and part of it is the school's becoming more aware of students who are already receiving services, both from outside service providers and special teachers within the school. In addition to discussing progress with identification and

coordination, this section also discusses progress in the school's making connections to parents.

Generally, the school has taken several steps that seem to be bringing people together in ways that facilitate this goal. Those steps include the formation of school groups where staff can learn about individual students better (e.g., home-based advisories -- about which there were considerable mixed feelings and which will be discussed in more detail later) and where staff members can share what they have learned with each other, special events like Career Day, and ongoing attempts to interact more with parents.

While recognizing that there is considerably more to do in this respect, interview participants note progress. The home-based advisory program serves a purpose in improving staff members' knowledge of students:

> Home-base is supposed to be a way to know students in a non-threatening way [to get to know their] developmental, interpersonal, and academic skills. [A] few don't want to be reached. [There is] nothing you can do with them.

> Home-base advisory is an important outlet for kids, they receive personal attention.

Other groups in the school provide ways for information about particular students, and the services they might need, to be shared. For example, the teachers on a particular team can now observe and talk about the same set of students and then call in special teachers when acute problems are identified.

> The counselors, psychologists, and special ed teachers usually take referrals from teacher teams and [help figure out] how to help this kid. They are resources to rely on.

Connecting with other service agencies in the community is also a part of providing coordinated help to needy students. A major step at the school in this regard is having county-funded, part-time pediatric, social work, and drug abuse assistance physically located in the school. Interview participants seem

to expand the definition of community connections from just social service agencies to include parents and businesses as well.

> Community agencies are stronger every year. There are more parents, more volunteers, more outreach. We're getting a lot of support for the kids.

> With some of the agencies, there are many more services. With the data entry clerk, [we can] access much more information. Everybody who gets referred gets entered in. It's good coordination. 'Quickly prevent problems' has been our motto this year.

> Career Day was a way of bringing business into the school [and could set up] a key citizen network. It gives them an overview of the school so they will have a better understanding and can communicate it to others.

> [There are] more parent conferences, more parent involvement. Going out from the committee, not coming to us. We are reaching out.

> Parents understand what's happening; better communication with parents. They are more positive about sending kids to school.

> Parental involvement [is better]. They see that students do homework, follow-up on notes, are aware of what's happening, and attending more parent conferences.

Participants, however, caution us not to assume that these first steps to increasing community connections means that the school has become dramatically integrated with the outside world.

> I haven't seen the relationship with the community change, not yet. I know the community has been informed of meetings, with letters, but I don't know if it's sunk in; I don't know if they know how much a part this is [of what we're trying to do]. We see parents prior and after suspensions. It's vague to know if [there is] support or whatever. The PTA president knows [what we are doing], and a core around her. The core group is well-informed; whether that translates, I don't know.

Collaborative development. At the heart of the middle school philosophy is the interdisciplinary team. In these teams, the same group of teachers work

with the same group of students, and at intervals the academic and special area teachers meet to discuss student progress and to plan for subsequent activities.

> Teachers are working together. It's given hope (to kids and teachers), primarily to new staff.
>
> It gives specialist teachers an outlet to communicate concerns. The shortened day gives teachers the opportunity to communicate.
>
> There is a renewed enthusiasm. Wednesday we get out early, which is wonderful, but we need to use it for work, we can't just talk all the time.
>
> The way the teams are meeting together [is positive], devising team activities, which is something new.
>
> Being anti-team, I've come a long way.

A number of benefits seem to accrue from the teaming structure, according to a majority of the teachers. For example:

> Teachers are better organized in order to keep up with team demands. Special subjects feel more included.
>
> The teams are taking on responsibility for academics and discipline rather than referring [kids] to the office.
>
> Teachers have a newness in a revitalized sense; they focus on different things [that are] carefully thought out. [There is] consistency and unity. There is a bad sense of competition, but it pushes people too.
>
> I'm pleased with the whole mood of the school. Some teams are very efficient, others want to be perfect, "the best newsletter", for example. It's neat to see that, though; it hasn't been there in the past. Change is the scariest thing in anyone's life. We are starting to feel okay. The unknown was very scary. Involvement has increased 85 percent and has bought in different levels. Some are involved in everything, others do what's assigned.
>
> Now everything has fallen into place. I concluded there would be a lot more paperwork, so I worked it out. I'm not as anxious as in September. The teams help a lot; we talk a lot.

Benefits for students are also apparent to teachers. Indeed, they believe that much of the improved tone in social interactions discussed above stem from the teaming arrangements.

> Yeah, I think there is a sense of more unity, school unity. I think it's a matter of degree, a team spirit. The tremendous turnout for the dance might be due to more confidence, a sense of belonging, realizing 'Oh you talk with my math teacher.' [We] now have team halls rather than subject halls; they see us talking more.
>
> Kids recognize more of what a team is trying to do. This will increase as activities increase. Teams do have an identity. Kids really like that.
>
> Teams give students more identity. We're building on what we did last year.

The idea of teamwork, however, seems to be spreading beyond individual teams to how the entire school works as well.

> [At first] it was very noisy, unruly and disheveled. [Now] we feel like we are a team.
>
> We are a team; it's a tough school and we need support. We are more organized.
>
> We are achieving the middle school structure (better attention on kids needs), and it will have impact on achievement.
>
> [There is] a high level of democratic decisionmaking now. We kid each other about the high cost of democratic high involvement. Site-based management is happening here through the project, a high degree of involvement and participation. I love it! Everything used to come from up above, the budget, etc. There is still a minority [that says] "Somebody could have done this for us."

Special student populations. The home-based advisories seem to be an important development in attending to the needs of special students. The program is intended to improve students' connectedness to adults, to attend to students' interpersonal problems, and to develop mutual respect through a weekly class where a small group of students interact intensively with teachers in a different environment than regular instructional lessons. A curriculum guide

has been developed, and has met mixed reactions, as has the overall program. [These will be addressed a little later in detail.] Despite the difficulties with implementing the idea, the program has given teachers the opportunity to learn more about all students as people and students the chance to feel that someone knows them, including other students.

> Home-base advisory is an important outlet for kids; they receive personal attention. The shortened day gives teachers the opportunity to communicate with each other [about students].

> I did a poll of all the students that had met at least one new student in advisory. For example, one average kid has adopted a special ed student without my urging. It has been really positive.

Perhaps it would be most fair to say that all of the changes the school is attempting are intended to benefit all students. Thus, special needs students become a part of the whole rather than singled out for attention. The greater the communication among staff members about students, the greater the chance that special needs will be discovered and addressed.

Professional development. Ultimately the schools are to become professional development centers for other schools. At present, understandably, they continue to wrestle with the kinds of staff development they themselves need. Much of this appears to be an outgrowth of trying to handle the tasks they have set for themselves.

> I didn't know anything about it [the topic of their committee]. Our committee spent two months in research. We came up with a decent product as a first step.

> We wrote a curriculum [for home-based] from surveys and assessments. We looked at main concerns and made them monthly topics, so you'll see test-taking, self-esteem, cultural diversity. We've learned a lot in the last few weeks.

> We met three days in July. We read on the first day the literature on how to do it, and how to get staff to buy in. We had to dispel preconceived notions. Then, we developed lessons for the staff.

> [On teams] we ask questions and make suggestions. [It is] less intrusive to teachers, and the most effective staff development. It forces us into other staff development.

The school also has made big strides in getting the faculty involved in district staff development. Several of the teachers have become trainers for local workshops and around 28 faculty members completely filled a fall workshop offered on learning styles.

Difficulties. There is no question that change is difficult. And with it comes a great deal of stress and anxiety that often blurs the focus on the fact that progress is being made. It seems that staff members have a realistic understanding of the complexities of what they are going through. They know it will not be easy. At the same time, however, they wonder if it has to be as hard as it is.

> Teachers feel stressed, justifiably so. There's a lot more on them.

> There's just a lot more pressure to make it work. I shouldn't feel that way. We're pulling teachers or pushing them, kicking and screaming, into this. It could have been avoided. They could have done what they said they were going to do. When they came up with the plan, they said, 'don't do it all at once.' We have three to five years; [take] one focus a year.

> The faculty is more tense. The expectations are not as clear. It used to be you taught, that's taking a back seat; there are too many meetings. Home-based is causing a lot of tension. The philosophy is fine, but it's not being translated. A lot of people are going home very tired, not the children. It's high tension.

> I heard a lot of comments betting on more transfers, but if you go though the roster, you can't identify anyone [who's leaving]. I'm hoping it is just frustration that will even out.

> [There are] expectations for an improved school, in children's belonging and work habits and a bit more parent involvement, but [there is] less respect right now for adults.

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Much of the tension seems to stem from the increased demands on staff members' time and whether the time is being used appropriately.

> I sense, not a frustration, but 'boy we've got a lot going on,' 'how much time can I put in?' But we're not really asking people to do more but to allocate time differently. The steering committee has been extraordinarily sensitive to mood shifts, almost on a weekly basis.

> The most negative aspect [is] the amount of time required. My job is direct services to kids. Because of the extra work, I'm cutting into that. Most of us do our work after school hours but some has to be done at school. For myself, the payoffs are well within the realm of being satisfying.

> The time element, the teachers amount of work and still have regular duties, it is a lot to ask. People are here before me at 7:00 AM.

> The system is taking on more responsibility for the success of students, but is taking away from instructional time.

> I say everything doesn't have to be done today. If anything, my expectation is to keep them focused, slow down, not run around in nine different directions.

Some people feel that the demand curve had peaked and that perhaps the situation is easing somewhat:

> In September, the first 2 weeks, there was a high level of tension; personally I thought it was too high. With home-based, a whole lot at once, we could have waited. Since about October that tension has been replaced by a feeling of hard work and cohesiveness. The majority bought in, the minority grumble less. People are starting to buy in or be quiet. A lot less tension now.

What got singled out for pushing people "over the edge," as one person phrased it, with respect to the tensions and time demands related to the project is the home-based advisory period.

> If we separated what we asked teachers to do that's new and innovative just for interdisciplinary, we could have dealt with that. But we laid on that damnable home-base. [It's] good in theory but [when you] layer on too much, I'm afraid teachers are going to lump together all of it.

> Implementation is very mixed; some teachers follow the lessons, some don't. I still stick to the objectives but adapt them to kids' needs.

> Home-base advisory needs attention. We went at it too fast, it needs a second look.
>
> The philosophy is great. Implementation is very difficult. There is not enough time to get a settled situation and accomplish anything. It moves too fast. It needs a whole period. I don't know how well I'm doing.
>
> Teachers like some lessons, others didn't.
>
> Someone's cooking the numbers saying teachers have taken to it because teachers are not really into it. The concept is nice, but it needs to be thought out. It really needs one meeting a week, grouping is poorly done, and the heterogeneity is hurting it some and holding it back.
>
> [We're] home-base meeting to death. It has potential. I scrapped lessons but still try to follow objectives.

Kids as well are reported to have mixed feelings about the activity.

> They enjoy home-base because they don't have to do anything. The exception to the rule is getting something from it.
>
> Teachers didn't expect so many to turn off so soon. There's a home-base look -- glassy; it's not what we were told it would be.
>
> Students don't like home-base because it's a waste of time.
>
> Kids in home-base smile when they see me.
>
> Home-base? Kids like it; some teachers haven't adjusted.

Beyond the general concerns about too much going on and the specific worries about time demands, people express some reservations about the plunge into shared decisionmaking.

> A lot of goals are not shared with the faculty at large. 'Read [this] at your convenience' is the way it's presented. [Someone says] 'I've got to give you this, but it's none of your business.' For example, with the committee meetings, it was said, 'Anyone can come,' but the agendas were taken back. Anyone can come? When we went, they looked at us like we had three eyes.
>
> It's an oligarchy and we're just the serfs. The illusion of choice is often presented. [For example], with the staff development money, the county wanted to know, 'Should we give it back?' Team leaders made suggestions [on how to spend it] and wanted to know if people would vote on [the ideas]? 'Oh

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no,' they were told, 'we just meant the steering committee.' Why bring it up if they're not part of it.

In other interviews, the tone is less cynical. People shared with us that new procedures for making decisions are being put in place, but that staff members are still feeling their way around, occasionally slipping back into other patterns.

> Decisionmaking? Ostensibly it's different. I think in that sense we did create a system for decisionmaking, but we need to keep reminding each other [about it].
>
> My worry is that we need to develop a system by which it occurs without the steering committee or the principal. A lot of site-based management is going on. I think people will want to keep it.

Of course, the above difficulties have to be balanced with the sense of progress staff members feel. In fact, staff members can more eloquently sum up the situation than we can. The majority of people are cognizant of the difficulties while remaining hopeful for positive change.

> I tend to be pessimistic, but I am now more optimistic. I'm more of a cheerleader. Our committee is willing to work with what we have, we're not dreaming about unrealistic situations.
>
> The mood of the faculty -- they've bought into home-base for the most part, bought into the idea of school improvement project. There's higher morale, unity of purpose, focus, being part of a team. Teachers are pretty upbeat considering the problems that exist in this school. They rally around the SIP. That's positive, if you don't win the faculty, you can't win the kids.
>
> It is making the image of the school better in the community and district because we are 'doing something.'
>
> I don't expect a whole lot, but now I feel it's worth it. I thought we'd tried everything but we haven't. I don't have expectations, but they emerge: club participation, faculty involvement, teamwork, hard work of committees, more parent and student volunteers.
>
> Much more so in this building is the hope that something will happen and a sense of power to make it happen.

> I was anxious at first; it seemed like an overwhelming task. As they've made it clearer, I feel it's possible, I haven't given up. I think we can do something; I'm [still] anxious about the extra work.
>
> I don't hear as many complaints. I see good coming from it. I really think Middle River will lose its horrible reputation in these three years, if we don't forget it. We'll become a school where people won't look down at us. Something will come of it.

Riverview Middle School

Student and school performance. Participants at Riverview did not address traditional measures of student and school performance, i.e. standardized testing results, when they described the progress they were beginning to see as a result of their efforts with the Carnegie project. They talked mostly about changes in student behavior and expressed concern that traditional standard measures, i.e. externally developed tests of student performance, would not describe changes in student behavior that more directly related to the goals they are focusing on in their school. Testing was viewed as legitimate when it matched their need for information about students or reinforced the instructional experiences they value. For example, on this topic teachers shared:

> I think we can take MSPP tests more seriously then something to endure that will be thrown away. I think it could be better than what people think it could be.
>
> MSPP - I did it last year in the fifth grade, so I'm familiar with it. I don't have to do anything differently. I do more integrated things anyway which is the same thing the test does. I'm conscious of it, in the back of my mind, but basically it's the stuff we're doing anyway.
>
> My opinion of the state has changed. Last year, with MSPP, they had no idea what we were doing with the science test. They've gotten their act together this year. Tests are cutting back hours with selected tasks given to each kid. Tests mimic real life better. I think there's hope. But if this sort of testing is valued they should throw out the other tests.

With respect to assessment of less traditional understandings of student performance, some teachers expressed their concern that such means are difficult to develop, yet important:

> Mission Statement approach. Plan for data is really in the middle, caused a philosophy controversy. There are those who want hard data, they think that shows what kind of school we are. Then there are those who say, that has very little to do with it. That group wants to measure the unmeasurable. [The principal] had each group of discipline teachers write five outcomes and how we will review this. This captured with a narrative is important hard data.
>
> They (the goals) seem a little personal to me, for example: "How many kids are happy?" How are we going to measure that? I could use attendance for that.
>
> We've never done this before: two for writing - use writing process/correct grammar; one for reading - not skill-based, basically we will not turn off people. It's measurable when kids say "that was great" and see how much fun it is; and one for proper usage. We all agreed that "this stuff is cool."
>
> No one asks us to do anything, better data than other. Joint things are hard to get, always an interesting variety, don't want to compromise our philosophy.

Overwhelmingly, factors related to student behavior such as discipline, work habits, and attendance were cited as teachers discussed their perceptions of change in student performance since the initiation of the project:There's been

> major change because of the project/process.
> It's better -- for some it's harder, but better. Traffic in hallways is down, discipline problems with the eighth grade are down. Discipline and communication are easier.
>
> Behavior is better, there was only one referral in our team this year.
>
> There's been a big change in discipline [all four teachers counsel a student together]. Kids are producing more work.
>
> As far as quality of work, teams say more kids producing more work, because they keep better tabs. If a kid is not doing work, we can see that.
>
> The incentive program has been positive.
>
> Kids like coming to school.

They also described how student social interactions were changing as a result of some project initiatives:

> Students are nicer to one another; they help each other with work. An absent student never asks about missed work - he gets it from other students.
>
> In the past when I taught low kids the self-esteem was not there, they had terrible work habits. Now I get their homework because the whole team will get a free night. Low kids are getting A's because they are working with each other. Kids, low kids, who would be making my life miserable because they would be feeding off other low kids. Discipline is so much better. Self-discipline is so much better. This is the best thing we ever did. Last year was tough, a transition -- this year we're more comfortable we know what we're doing. It's just great.
>
> Kids know the names of their classmates.

In addition to changes in student behaviors, local measures of student performance such as grades, were also described as improved:

> Incredible impact academically and socially.
>
> Kids have to be determined to fail.
>
> I see more As and Bs, better attendance, fewer discipline problems.
>
> Kids find it easier to succeed. The have the same broad rules, they know what's expected, and I know what's expected from other classes.
>
> Weakness [we had to address]? Attendance. Attendance incentives are all over the school, if we have 97 percent [defined] we'll have an in-school dance. Last month we had 96.1. This month they're asking, "Do we have it today?" Attendance is everywhere... just addressing the problem gave us 75 percent attendance. I like it like this. It's made a difference just in grades. We didn't have any Es and only a few Ds out of 120. We've been tracking them down, they get their work done.
>
> Kids have better grades, it's more rewarding for teachers.

The ways teachers described changes in student and school performance reflect the process they engaged in during planning for student results -- attempting to connect their efforts and plans directly to student experiences:

> There is a general unspoken feeling 'we will make all decisions based on what's best for kids.' For example, last year a girl missed 57 days (grades were passing) we struggled with retention and how to encourage better attendance. We retained her, but we created a structure for her and goals [to promote her at end of September].
>
> [Will students see results?] I hope so, 1) expect higher level of academic achievement and 2) have better feeling about learning. I hope they will say 'I want to do it for me.' Our mission statement gives us something to focus on. Now we have a standard to go back to. But I don't think it should stay the same forever. Kids change, society changes.

And finally, the need and increased ability to share student progress with one another, and with students themselves was also mentioned:

> [The computers provide us with] direct information about students. For example, we're starting science fair projects and I'm able to look and see who will be involved. I'm pulling up information on math and reading scores and providing instant retrieval and feedback to kids.

Comprehensive service delivery. One of the most visible changes in the area of comprehensive service delivery to students at Riverview has been the addition of a full-time school nurse. The response by teachers to this addition to the school's ability to address the needs of Riverview's students was overwhelmingly positive. Their comments also illustrate the way teachers judge the worth of innovations and changes against what they perceive to be the special needs of their student population:

> We have the nurse practitioner - that's a big improvement, she's here everyday. Because of their SES, the kids don't see doctors and she keeps them in school.
>
> The benefit of project involvement? Now the nurse is here.
>
> If we didn't have Carnegie, we wouldn't have the money. That's nice. You have an idea and don't have to stop because of money... we have a new emphasis on health. We can have a nurse practitioner, that's wonderful. Kids can come to school and get a strep test, that's important.

In our analysis we also considered parental/community involvement as an integrating factor, providing a link between student experiences at home and at school. Reflecting that focus, participants highlighted:

> I worked with a group that wrote the mission statement. We started talking about what the important things were for students to accomplish. We all wanted the same things, then what we wanted from the teachers, we agreed there. Then we felt we should include the parents, that was the hard part. We said that this is what we expected the parents to do. We took it to all the teams. A few things were semantic and definitional. For example, we used the word strategic, and were concerned that parents might not understand. But we decided that it was for us, our mission, that was what we were focusing on.

Participants shared their perception that due to increased communication this factor was improving, citing a number of indicators that the school's image in the community was improving right along with it:

> Now the community is receiving positive feedback. Riverview had a bad name. Now parents impressed with how caring teachers are.

> Community - first year, last year, they were against it. They came in droves. They heard about teaming, not knowing what it was, but it was a change and that was upsetting. This year with the PTA more of a different response, not as disposable. Last year we didn't know the parents of all the kids. Also, parents with bright kids were saying, "I don't want my child in the same class as a retainee." That PTA night, parents came to nail teachers one-on-one. This year there's none of that.

> Now it's easier for us to get together with parents, there is better communication. (Due to the computers) access to parent names/telephone numbers.

> Examples of parental involvement: high attendance at back to school, 1/3 increase in enrollment in PTA, 50 percent of parents are in the school at some time. Its helped to improve the school's image in the community. We didn't have a good image, now parents talk about positive things. Parents come in more, they call me at home they volunteer at school.

Teachers also saw the need to continue their efforts in this area:

> Something I thought about when I knew you were coming - how much outside publicity has the project gotten? I haven't picked up a newspaper and seen 'Riverview receives Carnegie.'

In our student newspaper there was excellent PR - why was Riverview selected? The community was not aware. It's true about looking at how our PTA numbers have improved, but look at elementary membership -- 80 percent. It drops off in middle school. That's when we need them. People are always so down on schools. The expectations are more than we can deliver. We're a Carnegie school for reasons other than need.

Community - I don't know. Sure some of parents are ... still early in school year. It takes time to get out into the community.

Finally, one participant commented on overall service delivery:

We're having more interagency harmony - more people are coming in, maybe I'm more aware, but it seems like more resources. That's a direct result of Carnegie.

Collaborative development. A critical condition for effective collaboration is good communication. The participants at Riverview we spoke with clearly believe that communications in general, and with respect to students and instruction in particular, have improved. They attribute this both to their participation in site-based management, to working in teams with groups of students, and to their increased access to computer technology. They view this increased communication as positive, sharing these perceptions of the impact of teaming:

I'm only on the team, not on the committee. I have input through my team. We had a lot of different ideas. Remember discussing them, and then we sat down. It's the same this year. We talk after our meetings. We talk every day. That is totally different than before these last two years. It's not the same, it's new, before we had special time for communicating. Now we have a better idea of what's going on.

Now we're entering background on all our students, our team does our own students, it makes it convenient to share things with colleagues. [Other benefits include:] student who missed classes just used a disc to catch up, it helps us coordinate our schedules (e.g. computer lab, VCR). I'm getting more aware of the school and uses of computer, our team was one of the slowest to use it.

Overall, in terms of the school atmosphere, there is more communication. Now we can send messages to other teams.

Overall communications improved. For example, materials are not always available. Even just seeing who will use materials so we don't overlap.

Teachers also described the impact of planning for instruction together:

Now I use lots of cooperation, lots with thinking skills. They're getting reading enrichment (30-35 minutes a day). Last year we were concerned about how to handle it. Ten teachers spent one day this summer outlining the guidelines and philosophy and we purchased some materials.

We have an interdisciplinary research unit. In social science they're working in Africa, they're doing papers and graphing too.

[In terms of personal changes] since we have teams the definition gives kids the benefit of the doubt. I do more group work now, where before it was individual. I didn't do any group work. Now I do cooperative learning.

Team - couldn't be better. We're assigned 'X' amount of kids. It lets us keep better tabs on the kids, helps us pinpoint progress and do field trips better. Easier to get kids out. Six of us can do it. We meet on a regular basis and we always check with each other. I love it. We're doing Paul Revere's Ride as a holiday activity. We can integrate more things, there's more consistency in the policies.

Last year Carnegie gave us a nudge in certain directions, we want to continue. The computers more than anything else, changed our classrooms, I use it every day, it made communications better in that we can send mail to one another, stay in contact better.

People on teams are looking at weaknesses, people used to just talk about weaknesses, for example -- art, communications. Now we do it. We're using computers all the time for lessons, banners, and mail. Every day we use it, sending things to folks on other end of school.

Teachers described the results of the interdisciplinary teaming approach:

Teachers are looking at students differently. We were in the mold of 'I tell you and test you,' we are now doing things cooperatively. We're focusing on social goals, we're more child-centered than content-centered.

If I look back, last year was a transition. As I compare the old system to the new system, there's a better sense of securing, a sense of family, more caring. We believe they feel the four of us care about them, that the four of us can all discuss a kid's problem, like four Moms.

As a result of their participation in teaming and schoolwide decisionmaking teachers described a growing sense of empowerment:

> [It used to be that] they, downtown and the state, made a lot of decisions affecting us. Now we make the decisions. [Our principal] gives us input, we take ideas to the teams, mull it around, make the decisions. We're forceful. We will tell ourselves, 'I'm very satisfied.' Last year we had bugs to work out, this year I'm pleased.

> We made sure we included teachers making decisions, being very specific that we would be in control of these areas. [The principal] suggested that we consider that when a new superintendent came in we should spell out what we want - be straightforward. We tried to make use of what we are doing for kids that we already have a picture of that we don't want to confuse. We want to focus on the mission statement, the whole faculty approved this.
> We're not a one- or two-man ship, we set directions and goals cooperatively.

> It's changed from [the principal] making all decisions, to us telling him we're a team working with him. It's not a democracy, but it's closer, we have more responsibility.

> Night and Day: I did a lot of checking up on this school before joined with [this principal]. Teachers here are more involved with everything. The last school I worked with, the county wide statement was done at the board. There is no pressure to conform here. Everyone is different, there are a lot of good teachers, a lot more flexibility and trying things out.

> Empowerment: It's really nice to know you're in charge of your time. Nicer than being told what classes you have. We just get together and decide. My husband (who is a business manager) says you do more work this way.

> [What's been positive?] Anything that involved teacher empowerment, I appreciate being able to offer my ideas.

The result of empowerment, as teachers see it, is increased commitment, both to participation in the process and to the school's mission:

> We're more flexible with teacher involvement, more staff are involved. We have six new committees this year. Ninety-eight percent of the faculty are voluntarily represented on at least one committee.

> One of the things I wanted to put in was the number of teachers participating in decisionmaking because it was the same seven all the time. This year it's more broad.
>
> We've told teachers it's their ballgame and they have gone with it (most stay one to one and a half hours after school).
>
> There's a real different attitude. We can do it on our own. We got what we wanted in the end. Everyone still decides when they come, and because the meetings are larger, we get more accomplished when not here, that's a necessary evil. But to have the school take a look at itself -- we look at things now instead of just doing it because we've always done it that way. If something's not working we find someone in building where it is working. The experts are here; we don't need to go outside.

Special student populations. Heterogeneous grouping seems to be an important strategy for serving the educational needs of special students. This strategy has led to changes, both in teachers' expectations for low-achievers and in students' relationships with one another:

> I was excited, had a strong feeling about heterogeneous grouping. I'm glad to see this mechanism happen in all classes (science was one of the first). I teach higher level work. My expectations are going up. Children are getting a better education and more are ready for high school.
>
> They [students] see each other more as equals than they used to, used to be high, middle or low kid and they didn't mix, still a little of that. I do a lot of cooperative stuff, they really begin to see themselves as equals who can help each other. Took a long time, but by the end of the year I see more respect for one another.

Teachers also described several ways they took what they perceived to be the unique needs of their students into account when planning for the project:

> The kids are different here because of the economic and rural aspect of it. They don't have things to do. Cruise Denton. There's not much else to do if you're under 16. It has an impact on our kids. We're addressing that with activities, using some of the Carnegie money indirectly.
>
> Late June we decided we needed: 1) additional English, 2) foreign language [all eighth graders every day instead of 'Thinking Teacher'], and 3) Special Ed or Reading/Thinking Specialist for seventh grade. We got two of the three but no raise.

> We've planned a power period one day a week for 30 minutes for extra enrichment, higher order, plus extra time for those who need more help.

A positive result of grounding planning in student needs has been a growing awareness of those needs, and a concern that those needs continue to be considered:

> There's been an impact because of the things we've received, but also because of looking at needs. We have all special ed kids on our team. For most of others they're oblivious to the numbers and the problems we're dealing with. When they found out, their jaws were gaping.

> [We have to consider] what's best for special ed students, think about mainstream versus special attention, we haven't fixed this one yet.

Professional development. One of the main thrusts of the Carnegie project is that the schools are to eventually serve as professional development centers for other schools. Currently, they are working towards systematic in-house staff development, trying to meet their own needs. Teachers at Riverview are taking responsibility not only for identifying needs and scheduling sessions, they are also developing their own training:

> Four or five half days [for staff development] each team having one day.

> In January we are presenting on conferencing and discussing how to use money for library materials.

> One team had computer training and they were to turn-key it for the whole school.

They are also disseminating information and training they received elsewhere, and looking for additional sources:

> We've looked for other schools doing this, we are making use of resources [national presentation made by one of them].

The access to computer technology and the training to take advantage of that technology, is one tangible change that teachers at Riverview mentioned

throughout their discussion of each of the five goals, but particularly cited as an opportunity for them to organize and support their efforts with students:

> I had computer training this summer [2 days], before I didn't even know how to turn it on. Now I use it for tests, plans, motivation banners, games, word processing, etc. Now 2/3 of the staff use it.
>
> We use it on our team to share information about tests, awards, health, grades, obligations (financial), and special needs of students.
>
> The biggest advantage is having access to parent phone numbers for evening calls.

Difficulties. Collaborating to effect change is difficult in and of itself, and when the individual philosophical differences that exist across a faculty have to be put on the table to negotiate a common philosophy and vision, that collaboration can be frustrating for individuals. Working through that frustration can be a positive and strengthening experience, but only if people perceive that their individual differences are respected and they are free to express them:

> Science - we did it across the grade levels. Overall things took ten minutes: knowing the process of science, technology-oriented, research-oriented, knowing where to look, how to look [tools for life]. I wanted a social one. I didn't get it, but kids should be able to work with anyone. The amount of science is okay but my goal is to work with other people. Our goals as science teachers don't parallel the mission statement - I was pushing for science to match the statement.
>
> We wanted to give Dr. Seuss' 'Going Places' as a prize when students are promoted. The problem came in selling the eighth grade team on the need to continue rewards, their philosophy was different [don't bribe kids]. They made the decision in their best interests, not the child's. After two meetings this changed, we incorporated this in our mission statement.

In addition to learning about one another, participants described the down side of learning other lessons that they now have to take into future

consideration when making changes. While that outcome may be positive in the long run, in the short-term it can be uncomfortable:

> I'm more knowledgeable about kids, more bogged down by knowledge of baggage the kids carry. Kids have so much emotional baggage, but because of empowerment things, we're in the middle of it. Boy, it's a learning process. I was naive before.

> We're more leery about having people come in and say they'll do something for you (three meetings and contract for instructional framework).

People's perceptions, just like their personal philosophies, are often divergent. When trying to assess the nature and the impact of change this divergence can make it difficult to pinpoint what has changed as a result of a particular initiative and what was already routine activity:

> Has this changed what I do with kids? No. I teach the way I've always taught. Kids are still the same kids. People say, 'Oh, it's changed,' I see the same things, both good and bad. I haven't changed.

> Nothing new came out [of the efforts last year]. There was a lack of clarity. Teachers bought in because of the money. Honestly, we were doing all this stuff before, now we're just knowing students better because of the groups.

Finally, a common difficulty in restructuring efforts in general is trying to adjust to unfamiliar demands associated with taking on new roles while continuing to satisfy all the demands of the old roles. As always, time is a scarce resource:

> We do so much of the administrative. Sometimes our team meetings will work on things someone else used to do. Some I agree with, like being in on parent conferences. But sometimes I wonder, when can you grade papers? We haven't graded a paper during the planning time - or dealt with guidance and dissemination.

Summary

Participants at all four schools generally perceive that things are changing for the better and they are concerned that changes in adult activity connect to

changes in the experiences of students. Working through the difficulties in capturing the nature of that connection and assessing the impact of changes with respect to student performance is a task facing many schools today -- particularly those schools that are focusing on a broader understanding of learning and student success. As participants move beyond organizational issues and factors, such as discipline and attendance (common concerns in the early stages of the restructuring process), they should begin to see progress towards making that connection and corresponding changes in students' perceptions of their role, the nature of learning, and towards success for all students.

Students' Views of Their World

While it would be unrealistic to expect students to see striking changes in their classroom experiences as a result of this initiative, it is important to establish a baseline from which to assess subsequent change. With that in mind, we began interviewing students this year. What follows are representative student responses in answer to three of the questions we asked. In sharing their perceptions of what teachers value and their images of good teachers and students, they also described their role in the educational process. At this point in the project, they describe themselves as receiving knowledge, rather than actively participating in its production. Just as it is early to expect dramatic manifestations of changes in the "rules" of schooling in students' lives, it is also early to expect revolutionary change in their understanding of their role in schooling. However, the implication is that their perception of their role should be considered -- as adults continue to alter their roles and relationships, trying to align their actions with results for students, they must continue to question whether the way the role of student is defined complements or contradicts the way the role of learner is defined. Project

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participants should ask themselves what they would like for students to be saying two or three years from now.

This section covers three of the questions we asked students, and provides their responses without our editorial comments.

Brunswick Middle School

What do teachers value?

Getting good grades.

Getting a good job. Going to college.

Learning, listening.

Doing what they say.

Not getting referrals, not getting checks [on the board], getting good grades, being a good sport.

Doing what they say.

That you learn and that they teach you something.

Being on time; they want your respect.

Accomplish what they're supposed to do [i.e. teach].

What's a good teacher?

If you have a problem, teachers will come to you (when you raise your hand). They explain things and don't get upset with the class. When one person does things (like talking), the teacher doesn't punish the whole class. Teachers give "free time" to do something of your choice, either to read or start homework.

Don't just put something in front of you and expect you to do it, [they] explain it.

Nice about it; gives enough work to do well enough; let's you talk quietly.

Let's you do things; don't have to do a lot of tests; is nice.

Lets us talk a lot, pop poppers, doesn't do anything -- even when we put pieces of tape on [the teacher's] chair.

Has reviews before tests, so you can know what you're supposed to study for.

Thinks of you as a friend and don't give you too much work. They give you the amount of work you can do in a day. If you get 100 on a test, they give you rewards like parties at the end of the month. If the teacher is working with another person, she will stop to help you and then go back to helping the other student.

Understands your problems; gives you suggestions about them.

Has fun activities. Good teachers want to help you. If you do a project, the teachers give you enough time to do it.

Not a regular routine like pull out your books and work. Teachers do activities to make you learn in fun ways (e. g. in language arts - creative writing, one person begins by drawing a head, the next person draws something else until it all comes together). Some teachers talk to you like a person instead of a computer. They let you ask questions and help you out instead of telling you to look it up and see for yourself.

Teachers care -- help students make up missed work.

Not mean.

Polite.

Meaness helps form students' attitudes.

Has experience in dealing with kids.

[Good teachers give] no homework. [In response, another student interjected] That's not true.

What's a good student?

Understand what is taught when the teachers ask them.

Listen and do what teacher says, don't make fun of how teachers dress, love and respect the teachers.

Follows directions the first time it is given. Respect others -- don't tease each other.

Respects others, is not teachers pet, not 'stuck-up,' does what they are asked to do, turns in work on time, and don't yell out to get attention.

Do all work, never get referrals, no checks, they talk when (they are) supposed to.

Stay on task, raise hand, be on time, respect, be prepared.

(Being) loyal and respectful, not mean or rude.

Do unto others.

Try their best.

Be happy.

Not calling each other names.

Behave.

Not getting in trouble.

Not chew gum, paper on chairs.

Do real, real good.

Get good grades.

Don't talk too much or get out of seat.

Good students are like honors suck-ups.

It means you can learn a lot.

Goes to college, finds out what you want to major in.

Gets a good education.

Canton Middle School

What do teachers value?

Students get an education, they don't bad mouth the teacher, they don't chew gum. They follow directions and study for tests and are quiet.

Students who pay attention and learn, listen, and absorb what the teachers are saying. Teachers want students to admire them (to like them - many teachers do different things to make students like them), they play games associated with what's being taught.

Their jobs. They talk about if I had another job I wouldn't be here right now.

Their students - the main priority is to teach and get something through to them.

Teach us - that's their job - not to let us fool around. They turn out the lights, some raise their hand, some say be quiet, shut up.

Some tell you to do your homework . . . We usually listen to the teachers talk. I like working with other students, but we only do that sometimes in advisory.

Teachers try to get the message through to students. Whatever subject is important to the teacher they try extra hard for the students to learn and understand. Teachers help students get their behavior better and may use special treatment with them to help them instead of having them sit on the side.

To do work and not talk, to pass to the next grade. They want you to get an education to go through high school/college. I plan to go.

Groups, working with other students -- to discuss things. We do it [groups] once in a while.

That we meet their expectations -- being good, do all our work, participating a lot in class. They don't think school should be all play, but some of it can be fun. Fun, is not much homework or classwork.

What's a good teacher?

Teachers want respect. They shouldn't talk to students abusively or curse at them. They shouldn't be mean. If the teacher is having a bad day before class they shouldn't take it out on the class. They should let the girl students go to the bathroom more (especially when they have their periods). Teachers shouldn't have pets. They should allow all the students to do something, give everyone a chance.

The teacher wants to make sure we do all our work; for the slower people in class, she gets others to help them. She has coaching classes - she will go back and reteach the whole class if we all have a problem.

If you don't know something they don't make you feel dumb. They make you feel comfortable with having a problem because that's okay and they will help you.

Nice to you. Spends time to help you after school if you don't understand stuff, because if they help you, you can understand when they explain.

Someone who understands your feelings, help you where you need it. Someone who is there to teach, likes kids.

Doesn't hate children -- like one teacher. Everyone calls her the four letter word for female dog. She despises children.

Pay attention to you if you need extra help. They are here. If you have a problem at home, they will help you. [A friend] had a problem at home and a teacher helped [friend's father had a drinking problem]. The teacher and the counselor helped.

Teachers who have interesting ways of making you learn.

What's a good student?

Don't bad mouth the teacher. Follow directions and never misbehave.

Keep good grades and always come to school prepared.

Students who get good grades, don't beat on other kids, are very smart, and don't make fun of other people. Students who know what they're doing when they do their work.

Don't have violence, racism, don't threaten people, do all the work, listen, learn, do their homework.

Someone who wants to learn. Someone who doesn't give teachers a hard time. Respects teachers and other students [i.e. don't talk back].

Someone who is willing and ready to learn, open minded. 'I may not like this subject, but I'm willing to give it a try', pays attention, does the work.

Has an attitude -- not a nasty attitude. Wants to do work; comes in and does it.

Wants to be involved in activities and to learn and come to school because he wants to.

Does his work, doesn't get detention, doesn't chew gum, doesn't talk back to the teacher. Doesn't get the yard [i.e., get kicked out of school], doesn't fight.

Middle River Middle School

What do teachers value?

Get support from the students, they appreciate them. Teachers feel better and want to teach. If kids followed directions it would make their day easier and they won't go home angry or mad, and if the students would do their work assignments and not fool around.

If teachers didn't make students think they were important, students wouldn't learn. Teachers want students to get a good education and students need to care now so that later in

life they won't have to 'flip hamburgers.' If they don't get a good education they won't be able to succeed and get money if they want families.

Kids need to learn more -- more knowledge, more information. It will be better for when we go out to be what we want to be.

To be cooperative, keep good habits, that we do what we're supposed to do. If you don't do those things you get bad grades.

To try to make kids that have trouble learning learn more and pay attention. They sit 'em up front, they put 'em in time out, then they give them a report. If they don't change they still try to teach 'em. That's just what they do -- try to teach.

What's a good teacher?

They help you, like you, not put your name on the board when you didn't do anything wrong. They make students learn. They let you sit with your friends and do what you want within the rules. They listen to what you say and understand and do things for you like let you sit with someone you like.

They listen to what you have to say, help you with what you need and give you things to help you understand. They will help you with your problems and will talk to you and tell you what to do about it.

They gotta know what they are talking about. They also should be funny.

They help you if you need help. Answer all questions. Like to see you get education and pass on -- I said that before. Care for you as if you were their own.

They sit down, explain, communicate and don't yell when you go to the bathroom. They send people that are bad out so it won't disrupt the class. They don't punish the whole class.

They sit down and try to help you. The teachers have something to do in their spare time but they help you, they cut plans and stay there and help you.

What's a good student?

Cares about others, not do nasty things, likes the teachers, doesn't hurt others, wants to learn and sets a good example for others to follow.

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Listens to the teacher, doesn't start fights, doesn't act up, never hits people, doesn't run in the halls. Students should get to class and do their drills.

Comes prepared, pays attention in class, does all their homework and classwork, they come to school as much as possible, be the best at what they do.

One who has a good attitude [i.e. wants to learn], willing to learn, always tries their best, and shows responsibility - that's the main one [i.e. does homework and classwork].

Goody-goody. Does everything right, the teacher's pet. Does work. Gets good grades, which I do not. I'm not too proud of what grades I get, but you'd have to be perfect. Sitting in class for a whole hour is difficult.

Someone who tries their best. Doesn't always have to get good grades. Doesn't talk back to teachers, doesn't get suspended. [Makes a face] I'm a good student but not a 'goody-goody.' I don't get good grades -- my grades are average. I just try my best to get good grades.

A person that pays attention, a person that likes to work, to be honest. I'm not really a good student, not the kind I'm putting down. I don't really like school, just like art, gym and music. I come because I want to get a good education. I'm starting to be neater now. Yesterday I got my notebook organized, I got my homework done.

Riverview Middle School

What do teachers value?

I guess students learning what they're trying to teach -- students having fun so they can learn easier.

To get your work done on time. If you don't they have a 'hissy fit,' they really get on you.

That we try our hardest, put effort into projects, don't get into fights. So we can get good grades and go to college, and do more for yourself.

They are here to give us an education and we have to learn so much before they pass us to the next grade. They have a goal at the beginning of the year and they push you to it. They want you to get smart for the next year. You are not allowed to just sit back and do nothing.

Teachers want students to 'make it out there' in the real world.

That they teach what they know to students so we can become better, knowing more information, and excel in school. They want students to like school. There wouldn't be any rowdy kids if they liked school. It's the same kids who are rowdy all the time -- they make smart remarks. We should have a good time at school, it's not just a place for learning.

What's a good teacher?

One who helps you when you make mistakes, makes you laugh, that's not always serious.

A good teacher expects a lot from you, but is understanding and a little lenient at times, not like a 'ten hut!' sergeant all the time. They expect a high level of work from you, but they are understanding if you are absent.

Not always grouchy, you can tell them different things, personal things. They help you with home problems, you can ask them almost anything.

They do different things, have different projects almost every day.

Teachers who call students' parents and let them know what is going on in school, and teach them and explain if you don't understand.

What's a good student?

A student who comes to school, tries their best, makes friends, works with everybody, doesn't mind who is in your group -- one kid I didn't like was put in my group, now he's one of my best friends.

Willing to put effort into work, willing to do different things -- like dissection work. Ready to do what the teacher wants, ready to learn.

Nice and polite to other people, don't start fights, walk away, willing to give up something for other people.

Being on task [on time for classes] and participates in class activities, gets good grades [no D's or E's] on their report card, always follows directions and don't skip class.

A student who pays attention in class, knows the work, gets their work done on time, turns it in and tries their best. They set goals and reach them.

Initial Observations on Systemic Restructuring

In this section, we look more closely at the "new way of doing business" across the levels of the state educational system. We must acknowledge that two years is too soon to talk about whether systemic restructuring is or is not happening in the project. Certainly the above sections, coupled with the information contained in MSDE's Milestones II, document participants' perceptions that significant changes in rules, roles, relationships, and results at the state and local levels are occurring. Whether these positive steps will endure beyond the tenure of temporary funding and staffing arrangements is another matter and is really the true litmus test of restructuring.

Nevertheless, at this juncture, there are some criteria that may be helpful in gauging the probability that something more lasting than the "tinkering" associated with much school improvement is going on: (1) the extent to which a shared vision of what student success means is being developed; (2) the extent to which decisions are being made based on this vision; (3) the extent to which adults are developing the capabilities needed to promote this vision effectively; and (4) the extent to which structural changes complement the vision. Embedded in this view of restructuring, obviously, is the assumption that beliefs about students and the actions resulting from those beliefs must be changed if restructuring is to truly occur. Prior to discussing what we mean by each of the four criteria and how much progress the project has made on each one, we expand a little on what we mean by systemic restructuring.

Systemic Restructuring

A social system's structure is its pattern of rules (common understandings about what is and what ought to be), roles (regular ways of acting that are expected of all individuals occupying a given position), and relationships (the flow of interaction and influence among various participants and/or groups).

Much more than a simple rearrangement of organizational charts, restructuring -- i.e., altering those rules, roles, and relationships -- addresses all of the regular ways of behaving that characterize a system, thereby insinuating itself into the system's organizational, political, economic, and cultural aspects. In education, the press for schools to make such alterations has stemmed from the need to achieve student results substantially different from those currently being produced, particularly in terms of encouraging higher-order thinking, cooperation, and self-sufficiency. Thus, the underlying concern of any educational restructuring effort -- whether the particular project involves decentralizing authority, increasing public accountability, altering the content and process of classroom instruction, or strengthening the links between schools and their communities -- is: How must the existing patterns of rules, roles, and relationships be altered in order to dramatically improve student results (Corbett, 1991)?

The primary reasons why restructuring is critical are that all of a system's energy must be intentionally directed in order to achieve substantial results and that rules, roles, and relationships are the characteristics that endure beyond the tenure of the particular individuals that currently reside in the system (assuming that the definition of an organization is a group where every original member has been replaced and that real leaders lead after they are gone). Addressing any less than all four aspects of educational restructuring, then, will limit the chances for increasing student success and actually represents "tinkering" rather than reform (Olson, 1992). For example:

> ●instituting a third-party funding arrangement for in-school social services alters the rules by which some resources are distributed to some people and opens the possibility of establishing additional such connections in the future; but the initiative would also have to affect system-wide definitions of roles and relationships and become integrated with the school's vision of what student results are

important in order to become more than an "add-on" to the school's operation

- providing every teacher in a school or district with thorough in-service on student and adult learning styles would encourage many of the teachers currently in the system to incorporate that information into how they enact the role of teacher; but if existing relationships remain unchanged, if specific student results expected to flow from attending to learning styles are left undefined, if new rules for student and staff evaluation are not established, and if new teacher induction programs are not created, then the system will find this information disappearing with the departure of current staff

- sharing decisionmaking among teachers and administrators alters the relationship between these two groups; but this action will ring hollow as an "improvement" if no clear connections to how students will benefit are made, no assistance in helping the groups become comfortable and competent with this change in their roles is given, and no formal changes in the rules governing the use of staff time are forthcoming

- holding a school or district accountable for improving student results, or performance (however performance is defined) without systematically attending to adjustments in resource allocation, training, and the educators' ability to make critical decisions will tend to lead to narrow, "quick-fix" strategies rather than broader, long-term changes.

Restructuring represents interactive changes among (1) student behavior and student learning, (2) the behavior of building administrators and teachers, and (3) the context in which a school operates -- including the district as a whole, the local community, and the state department and its policies. Changes in the latter two of these sets are necessary to bring about substantial and lasting change in student behavior and learning. This is what we mean by the term systemic restructuring: altering rules, roles, and relationships throughout the educational system -- not just in a building or district -- in order to achieve significant results for children. Systemic restructuring, then, is dramatic change. It acknowledges that the educational system must overcome the inherent

independence of action among classrooms within schools, schools within districts, and districts within the state in order to realize significant gains in student performance.

A Shared Vision of Student Success

There should be only one reason to restructure -- students. Without a clear picture of what schools should do for students, and through them for society, it makes little sense for educational stakeholders to invest considerable human and fiscal resources in revamping schooling. Confusion about student outcomes will produce contradictions in actions. Another way to talk about having a "clear picture" of student results is having a shared vision of student success.

In this section, we raise three different "indicators" of whether a shared vision of student success is beginning or likely to emerge in the sites.

The "sharedness" of the vision. This "vision" should be rooted in a rich, publicly acknowledged understanding of successful learning; and, in our view, successful learning should be thought of not only in terms of the set of characteristics individuals need to develop but also in terms of the nature of the social interactions individuals construct within their families, communities, and workplaces. In other words, the vision should be locally determined in that all local stakeholders agree about what they want to have happen with their children and soundly based in that the agreement is disciplined by stakeholders' experience, reasoned views of the future, and research on learning and personal/social/moral development.

It is hard to get a fix on which visions of student success are shared by whom in the four schools. The outcomes assessed by the Maryland School Performance Program (MSPP) are helpful as part of the input for developing a soundly based set of outcomes; but it is clear that many of the participants at the school sites either do not think of the outcomes from MSPP when they think

of students (based on the absence of its being mentioned when people are asked, "What would you like to see happen with students as a result of this project?") or do not think that these outcomes represent the universe of "most important" outcomes. People typically think of student outcomes very broadly, hoping for changes in students' self-esteem, empathy, ethical action, etc. as much as more traditionally measured cognitive and behavioral changes.

On the other hand, the schools (some to a greater extent than others) have some fairly widely shared ideas about student success in their particular contexts. These vary to an extent across the schools, and, once again, tend to encompass a wider range of outcomes than objective definitions of student performance.

So, at the moment, multiple ideas about student success are operating at various levels of the system. To assert that one view is correct would be to violate the necessity of local determination of the outcomes; to fail to address the plurality of views would violate the necessity of having outcomes that are soundly based and to allow possibly competing and potentially contradictory views of students to negate one another. Ultimately, to make the systemic restructuring claim, in our view, definition of student success "on paper" will have to become definitions "in the hearts" of all participants at all levels of the system.

Students views of themselves. The above assertion applies to students as well. Thus, at some point, we would expect to see students reflect definitions of student success in their words and deeds, even if they cannot necessarily articulate that they are, in fact, embodying the particular vision that is guiding a school's operation (and that they had a hand in creating).

The evidence that we have from talking with students and seeing them interact with each other and their teachers suggests that this reflection is not

likely to occur for a while longer. Their descriptions depict the good student as being essentially subservient and subordinate, a reactor to stimuli provided by the teacher -- good factory workers. In other words, the teachers are viewed as the front line supervisors determining what work is to be done and what work is good work. Moreover, the students' descriptions of the form of their schooling is consistent with that of past generations of students. For example, even in the midst of flexible scheduling and interdisciplinary teaming, the students clearly see a time and place for every subject: "If it's second period, room 204, it must be math." So, despite the potential that longer time periods and close proximity of teachers expert in different subject matters holds for schools, whatever is going on looks to these students a lot like what has been going on in secondary education for years.

It does seem that the students are beginning to recognize abilities in other students that have previously been unrecognized, and this seems to be a consequence of students' being able to work with one another. While our observations of the classrooms indicates that for the most part the activity flow is teacher question-student answer, opportunities for students' supplying some of the social mediation that must accompany learning are present. Additionally, teachers from all four schools are reporting that they are beginning to see some positive changes in attendance, assignment completion, and discipline referrals.

Still, students define the worth of their participation in school through the eyes of adults, which would indicate that students see themselves as relatively powerless actors in schools, not to mention in the hullabaloo about restructuring that is going on around them. This evidence suggests that the students hardly view themselves in the same way as the reform-oriented policymakers view the successful learner of the 21st century. While a

concomitant of this image may be improved test scores, at the heart of most visions of student success is the transformation from a passive to an active role. No matter how much the adults are "reforming," corresponding changes in student-related rules, roles, and relationships -- affecting all students -- will have to happen for there to be true systemic restructuring. This means that students will have become "insiders" in the process rather than remaining "targets" of adult actions.

Conversations about students. A third, intermediate indicator to determine where the development of a vision of student success is likely to go is to see where and with whom conversations about students are taking place. Beane's Affect in the Curriculum (1990:160) offers a nicely cogent view of the type of discussion that should occur to promote such a consensus: "open" so that participation is denied no one who has a valid stake in the educational process, including parents, all school system employees, community members, and of course students; "undistorted" so that the input of individuals and groups is not filtered or sanitized through others' lenses or solicited in a way that minimizes their value; and "reasoned" so that the bases for claims are acknowledged and open to others' inspection. In other words, key stakeholders need time to learn together, think together, plan together, and reach consensus on values regarding what students should become.

This intensive dialogue, to promote systemic changes, should be taking place not only within the schools (where a lot of it is going on) but also across the levels of the system: the communities, the schools, the central offices, and the state. Currently, it appears that the communities and the central offices are largely excluded from these discussions.

done. Moreover, "what is best for kids" is not very helpful in guiding the assessment of whether kids are better off.

Developing Adults' Capabilities to Promote Student Success

If staff members (and parents) are to facilitate the development of students with particular characteristics, then they must acquire and model these characteristics themselves. The adults must know what it feels like to be successful learners themselves. They must know what it is like to apply what they are teaching to out-of-school situations and must work consciously to help students make those connections. In other words, the only way that a mission based on successful learning can emerge as the sole criterion by which day-to-day decisions get made is if all the people making those decisions are explicitly and actively engaged in successful learning themselves.

In other words, the goal is to create a professional culture that has embedded in it the celebration of the very characteristics sought in students. A culture is "shared knowledge about what is and what ought to be, symbolized in act and artifact" (Wilson, 1971:90). Thus, the professional benchmark of a school or district trying to encourage successful learning in kids is an active commitment to successful learning on the part of adults. The adults serve as models of the qualities expected of students and are skilled in ways of establishing learning activities that promote these qualities in all students.

The combination of more involvement in decisionmaking and opportunities for professional development seems to have fostered an "openness" in project participants to new ideas and new ways of operating. A willingness to take risks and to step into the unknown are characteristics people have said they want to see their students develop and are ones that the adults are developing as well. This attitude bodes well for the schools' becoming professional development centers. Of course, for this orientation to become truly systemic,

then every child will have to be insured the opportunity to interact daily with adults who themselves are successful learners.

Changing Rules, Roles, and Relationships

Interagency agreements, shared decisionmaking, alternative assessment, flexible scheduling, and the like are not the beginning points of the restructuring process. Rather, they should be the consequences of extended dialogue about students, daily activities, and adults' professional commitments. These popular changes are simply possible answers to the question: "Given what an educational system wants to see students become, how can it operate so as to encourage that?" In other words, what is the connection between current and/or proposed rules, roles, and relationships throughout the system and the results a district wants to see?

People are not accustomed to thinking about how state level actions and the relationships between a state department and schools could directly affect students. It is more usual to think about how the state department and/or its relationship with schools facilitates or hinders the schools from focusing on instruction. All state departments carry some baggage as they begin to work with schools because the relationships never begin in the absence of opinions formed in previous encounters. Usually that baggage is negative. Such was the case with this project in the beginning:

> I'm not sure what [MSDE] can provide us that we couldn't provide ourselves.
>
> I am suspicious of some hidden agendas (e.g. definitions of world class schools). They've been doing things top-down for so long it will be difficult for them to change.
>
> In our county we've learned to do a lot with a little. We don't use the state department very much, we depend on ourselves. They really don't understand this county and how it works. It's nothing specific, just a feeling, that whenever we start to talk about something, they don't understand the situation of our kids. It would be nice to have people who understand and could come in and give us

> information and resources. ... We just don't feel they know where we're coming from.
>
> We want it in writing -- what we have to do. We have become wary, not less enthusiastic. We want to know up front what is expected. Maybe that's just part of this empowerment thing.

However, the extensive and intensive interaction between the TAT members and the schools managed to help overcome this baggage. School people overcame their suspicion that the state was only interested in getting the schools to do what the state wanted and recognized that the state was interested in helping the schools do what the schools wanted. Thus, a special component of this project is the relationship between MSDE and the schools.

Universally, site participants say that they have never worked with the state department with the frequency, depth, and collegiality that they currently are. At the same time, people acknowledge that this relationship will have to change if more middle schools begin a similar sort of journey. That transition is at the heart of systemic restructuring issues and its resolution will partially determine whether the "new way of doing business" becomes institutionalized. Still, the current relationship is unique enough that it warrants some mention.

Last year, MSDE TAT members played a huge role in getting the project at the sites moving. Their willingness to usher through the needs analysis provided a momentum that carried through the whole year. This year the schools seem to be taking matters more into their own hands. The formulation of the various school committees coupled with some of those committees breaking into subgroups has created a more decentralized system of decisionmaking, and so the TAT does not come across as being as central to the process. As one participant said, "MSDE is stepping aside more [as the process evolves] and allowing the schools to plan their own destiny." Their contributions remain substantial, however.

They are more supportive at this level just by being here and that's great. The state is making an effort to be present in the school. We can now go to them [directly] with questions as opposed to having to call five people.

Until we went into the project, we had no contact with MSDE in 19 years. We learned a lot from [the TAT member]. [He/she] has played a critical role, mainly by virtue of the experience they've gained throughout the state. We get myopic at times. The contacts they have are useful. If I say, 'Gee, I'd like to hear from [a person or program], they have them contact us.'

Our TAT member has been a big help. [He/she] has a good feel for what goes on here at the school. [He/she] tries to come to all the SIT meetings. [He/she] can see a point of view, being an outsider, that we can't see. They'll be the ones who will say go ahead and do this, urge us to do something when we hesitate. They also provide us with information on things we need and give us feedback.

I understand better what they do.

I see them helping us.

The TAT members are here all the time; they have bunks in the back. We know them by name. We know their cars in the parking lot.

We have come to know the MSDE people. We never saw them before. Our involvement with them through this project has changed my opinion of the state. People on the state team have brought expertise to the school and offered us a lot. We have come to respect them.

They have probably met and interacted positively with more people from school district in the past year than in all the previous years combined.

That's the best outcome for me -- we now have a face with a name. They are no longer just this entity.

We see the people from MSDE more frequently than anywhere I've ever worked. Our relationship with them is different; its more highly involved. It used to be they were coming in to deliver information, but now they offer support and resources. There is no hierarchical relationship, they're just a member of the team.

So, for school people, they look at the different way in which their work with MSDE has been structured so far, with respect to the TAT, and see that it

is congruent with rather than contradictory to the direction they are moving. Over the coming year, the challenge will be to detect the connections among the variety of state programs and policies and visions of student success as they become more clearly enunciated and more widely shared.

Summary

The glimpses of project life contained in the above sections should make abundantly apparent that systemic restructuring (1) takes a lot of time, energy, and courage on the part of everyone and (2) is an inherently messy process, full of talking, thinking, acting, sharing, and adjusting. Quite simply, if substantial, systemic change is to occur, all key stakeholder groups must be engaged in a very time-consuming process. Consequently, there is a need for a lot of learning: about the substance of the learning process itself, about the kinds of changes that have been attempted elsewhere, about the change process in each site, and about the values that participants bring to the conversation.

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